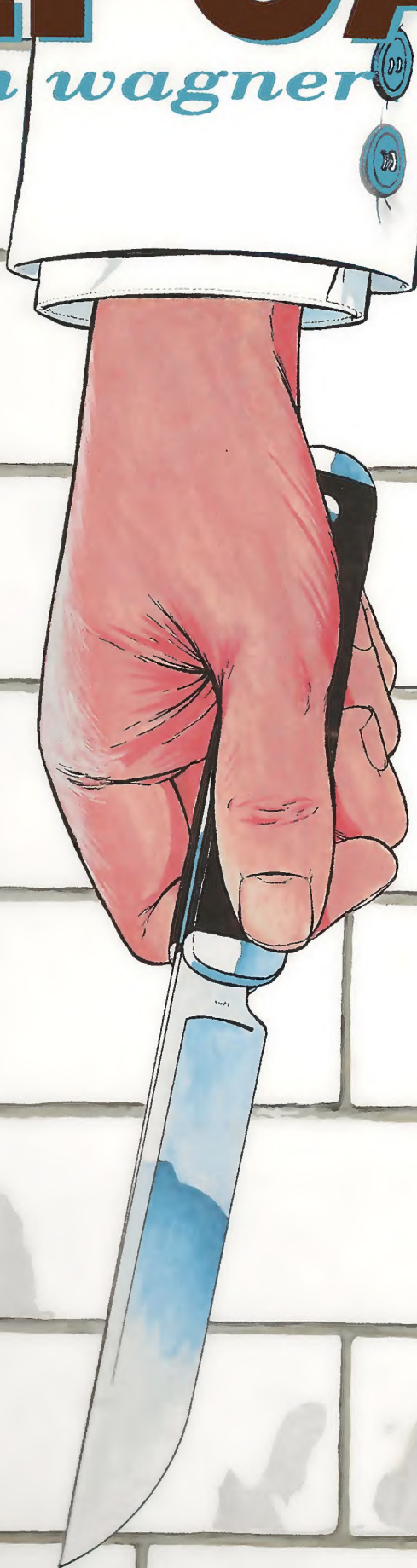


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# HEPCATS

*martin wagner*

6



*M. Wagner*

# WEEE LOOOVE YOU!

Thanks, folks. Thank you so much.

Really, I don't know how to say it.

First, considering several realities, specifically that most of my readers probably aren't necessarily any richer than I am, and that there are a million more important things in the world to spend 25 bucks on—groceries, the utilities bill—the fact that as many people contributed to the Save Hepcats fund as did is truly remarkable and even touching. No, we're still nowhere near the 400-sketch name-drawing level, but everyone who has found it in their budgets so far, to order something and help keep this book going, has my undying gratitude.

Of the approximately 50 letters I got in the weeks following issue 5, many of the people ordered multiple items; a sketch, a subscription, maybe a *Yo*. Some readers sent such generous help they rate a spread in *People* on humanitarianism. There was a handful of letters from folks who admitted they couldn't afford to contribute right away, but they would as soon as they could, but best of luck, etc., etc. In all, it was a remarkable vote of confidence for the survival of *Hepcats*, and I thank you for it; it would seem that *Hepcats* is indeed wanted. The week *Hepcats* 5 came out, I had less than \$150 to my name; in two weeks, I had over \$1,000 from fans, in addition to distributors' checks, and you can rest assured that extra grand I wouldn't have otherwise had helped me clear just about all my debts and forge ahead with new projects. After all, you're reading this, aren't you?

Double Diamond isn't out of red alert mode yet. I still owe Port a pile of money, though that's getting paid off slowly but surely (just too slowly). Therefore, the Save Hepcats campaign is still on full steam and will be for some time. If you'd like to order a sketch, please do. I need the help. This has been the best way I've found yet to stay on financial track; it's ironic other black-&-white publishers haven't thought of it before. (Another sobering fact: it seems now that the average black-&-white comic sales figures hover around 2,000 to 2,500—and these are for better established publishers than I. Considering the rough time I'm having at 3,150, imagine what it must be like for these guys who have several titles, office space, and editorial and creators' wages to pay for with books selling that shabbily.)

Further good news: the Diamond Retailer's Seminar in Las Vegas in mid-June, which I attended, seems to have been a success for me, despite the fact the seminar itself was an utter fiasco, what with Vegas having its worst rain in a decade on Sunday and over half the exhibit hall flooding. So we may be seeing an increase in orders starting with issue 8. Knock on wood. I've got everybody's business cards.

To close, I don't really know how to thank adequately all the fans who managed to eke some cash towards helping my little project stay alive. No one understands better than I how 25 bucks ain't exactly chicken dirt. So do this. Call your local oldies radio station and dedicate "We Love You" by the Rolling Stones to yourself. You deserve it.

One last word: I'm sure there were probably a lot of you there who might have liked to contribute, but didn't, for the very understandable reason, "Well, what if I did send money or subscribe, and the book folded anyway?" I hope the fact that issue 6 has made it here safe and sound is positive indication that I'm winning the battle.

More heartbreaking news: stalwart little indies like myself aren't the only publishers fallen on financial hard times, it seems. Oh, no, ma'am. Why, they're even feeling the pinch up in the golden, glistening halls of Marvel, where they've just sold, as you might know by now, 2,750,000 copies of a remarkably mediocre comic book (well, most people are using the term "piece of shit," but I'm of a kinder, gentler nature) called *Spider-Man* #1. And what does the House of Ideas think of this sales performance, particularly since it constitutes the biggest sales of any American comic in history? "Not to criticize the direct market, dealers, and distributors," said a Marvel mouthpiece in a recent *CBG* article, "but we're still not satisfied." *Still not satisfied*. My my. Wait; it gets better. The mouthpiece goes on to announce the second printing (gold ink), obviously geared to all the fanboys out there who failed to speculate properly the first time around and horde their 300 personal copies of what is sure to become an incredibly rare collectors' item.

Poor Marvel. Still not satisfied. Poor, poor Marvel. Pardon me while I dry my eyes.

Go directly to Hell. Do not pass Go.

Back to reality. There is still one item of bad news I suppose I should get out of the way. Another "stay alive" tactic I'm afraid I've been forced to employ is that of a price increase. Beginning with issue 8, the cover price of *Hepcats* will bounce slightly to \$2.25 U.S., \$2.75 Canadian, and £1.20 in the U.K. Sorry. I hate hate hate this. Reality, however, is reality. Since I believe that orders may pick up a bit with that issue, though, I'll do my best to avoid another price increase for as long as possible.

Now, the inevitable readjustments to the 1990 Schedule as detailed in last issue. First, the Erica T-shirts have been redesigned to feature a full group portrait. Check the inside back cover. I think you'll like this one a lot better than the misbegotten pin-up pose. (No, I don't know what possessed me either.) If you ordered an Erica shirt you should get one of these soon.

The "prestige format Joey and Gunther" book is still skedded, but is being put off until *Hepcats* the regular series has gotten reliably back on schedule and has been that way for a few issues, so that financial woes will be history—say, around the 27th century. It's a sidebar one-shot project done for fun, and so it deserves to be released when demand is good and solid. *Hepcats* the regular series, is, after all, priority numero uno.

*Lovestupid*, which, for those unaware, is the sequel to *Yo*, and a book that people have been demanding for two years, will still be released in November. Whether or not a reprint of *Yo* is released along with it will depend on the sellout of these first editions (no, you still aren't too late—come on, let's get 'em outta here). One detail: originally I had planned to make this another 108-page trade paperback edition, like *Yo*, but time constraints are preventing me from doing the lengthy Gaggus story that would have had to take up the remaining space. So *Lovestupid* will be printed in prestige comic format, and sell for less than *Yo*. I very much want to do more Gaggus stories, and I hope in about a year to devote something like a spinoff miniseries to the little Roman scribbler and his adventures in the ancient world.

The reprint of #1 will be out in a few weeks. I opted to get #6 out first, because it was so late.

Otherwise, everything's the same.

Back in January, I promised all the charming folks at ConFurence out in Costa Mesa, California, that I would write lots of nice things about their convention, and I'm sure they were very disappointed to pick up issue 5 and see nary a word on their do in my inside-front-cover babblethon. Sorry, gang, things came up. But I would like to take this opportunity to do a belated plug and tell anyone out there with an affection for the "furry" genre that this is one shindig you shouldn't plan to miss (contingent, of course, upon the feasibility of your getting out to SoCal). I had a swell time and if they want to invite me back, I'll go. I'm trying to cut down on con appearances drastically, as they eat into drawing time in an amazing way, but this one's worth it.

Once again, my eternal gratitude to all generous benefactors, as well as to those of you who can't afford it, but still faithfully read my stories every issue. You all help to make this whole project worthwhile. See you in about two. And, oh, yes—keep an eye out for *Comics Interview* #86.





DOUBLE DIAMOND PRESS  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

HEPCATS BY MARTIN WAGNER  
NUMBER 6

# **Snowblind**

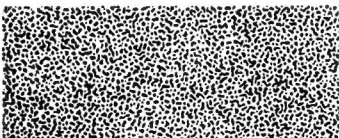
A NOVEL IN 18 CHAPTERS

Snowblind

Erica has been hospitalized following a near drowning her doctor, Geoffrey Stevens, believes was a suicide attempt. On the day she is to be released from the hospital, she is visited by a clinical psychologist.

As Arnie tries to understand why Erica may have tried to kill herself, the story flashes back about a week, just prior to Christmas of 1988, when Erica and Arnie have a holiday shopping trip planned with Joey and Gunther. Arnie tells the guys he and Erica plan to marry that summer, and at the mall, Arnie buys her ring as a surprise.

Later that day, unbeknownst to her companions, Erica sees a familiar face in the crowd, panics, and runs. Confused but not unduly alarmed, Arnie follows only to hear that Erica has fainted again and has been "carried off" by some stranger. Outside, the stranger—who calls Erica "Kathryn"—has carried her into a service drive to revive her, and Arnie soon catches up with them....





## **HEPCATS 6**

*Created, illustrated, and published by* **MARTIN WAGNER**

**PRINTING & SHIPPING  
PORT PUBLICATIONS, INC.**

*125 E. Main St.  
Port Washington, WI 53704*

*Circulation this issue 3,150*

**DISTRIBUTION**

**ACTION DIRECT**

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**ANDROMEDA PUBLICATIONS, LTD.**

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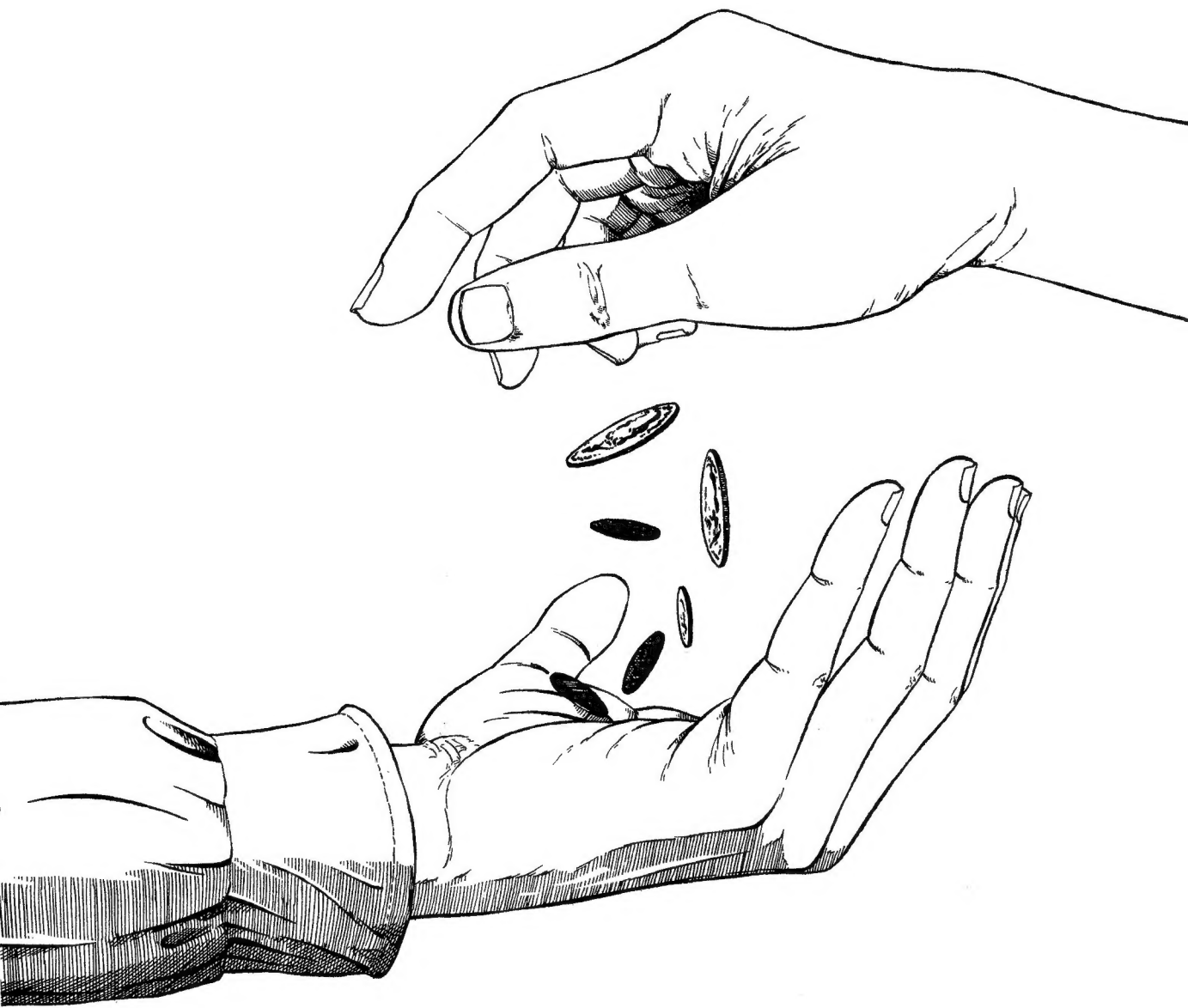
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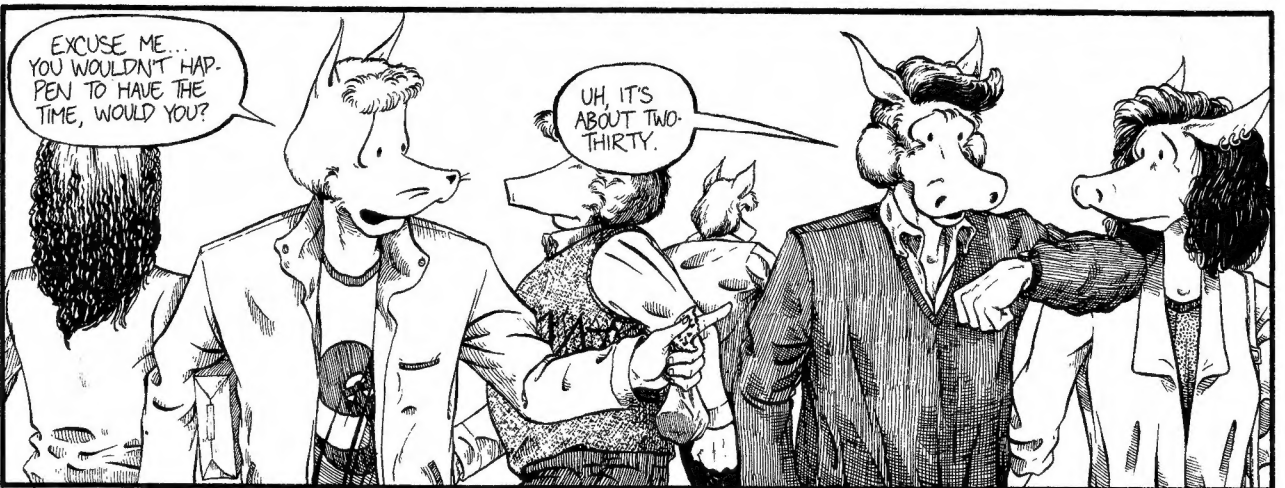
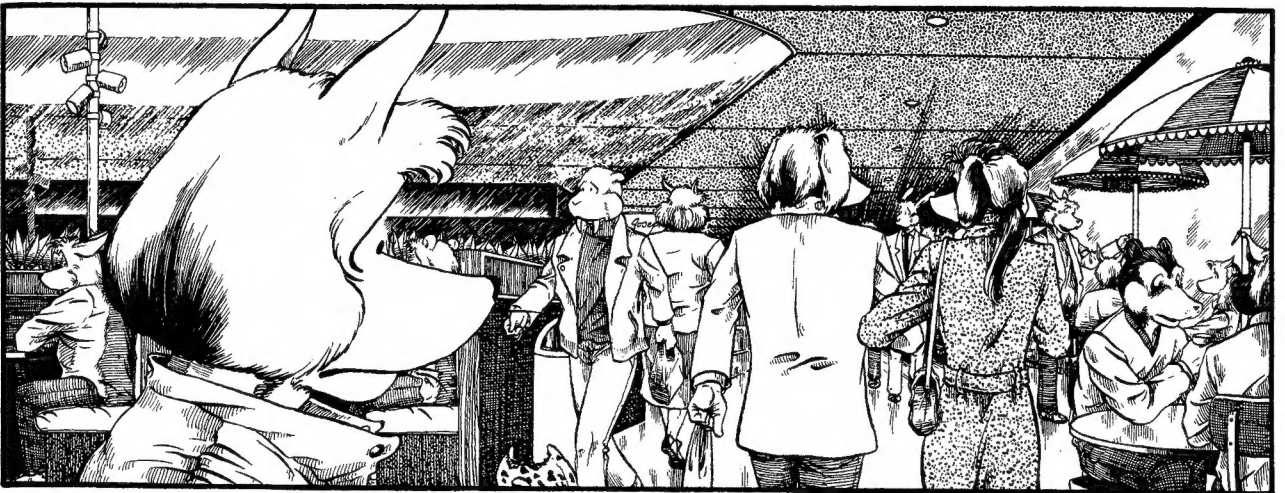
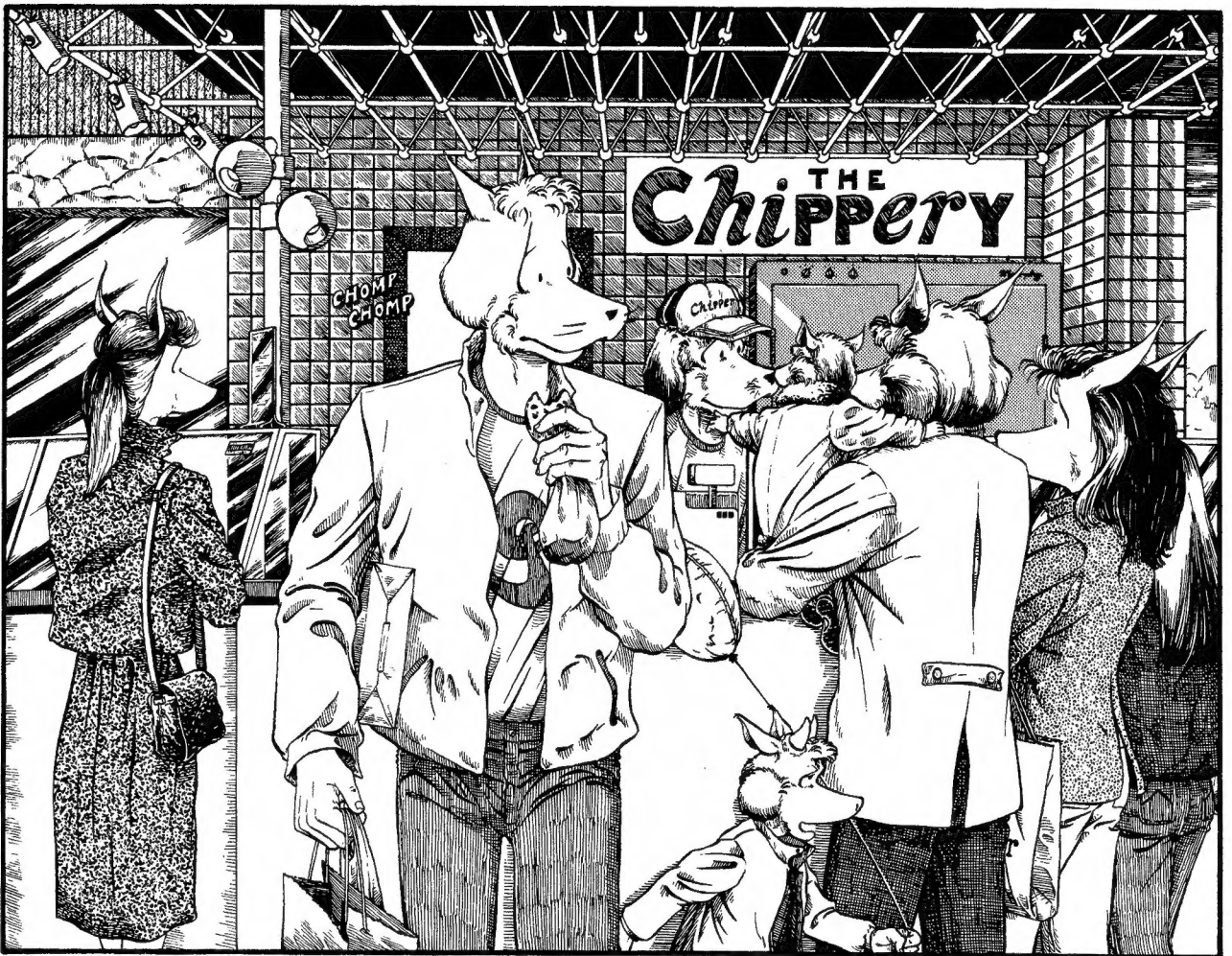
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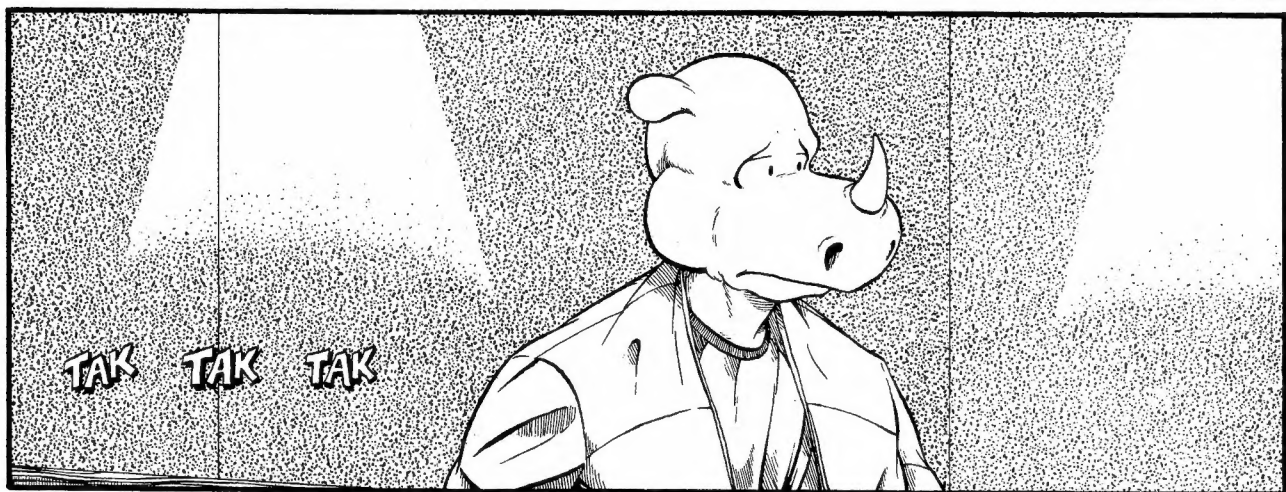
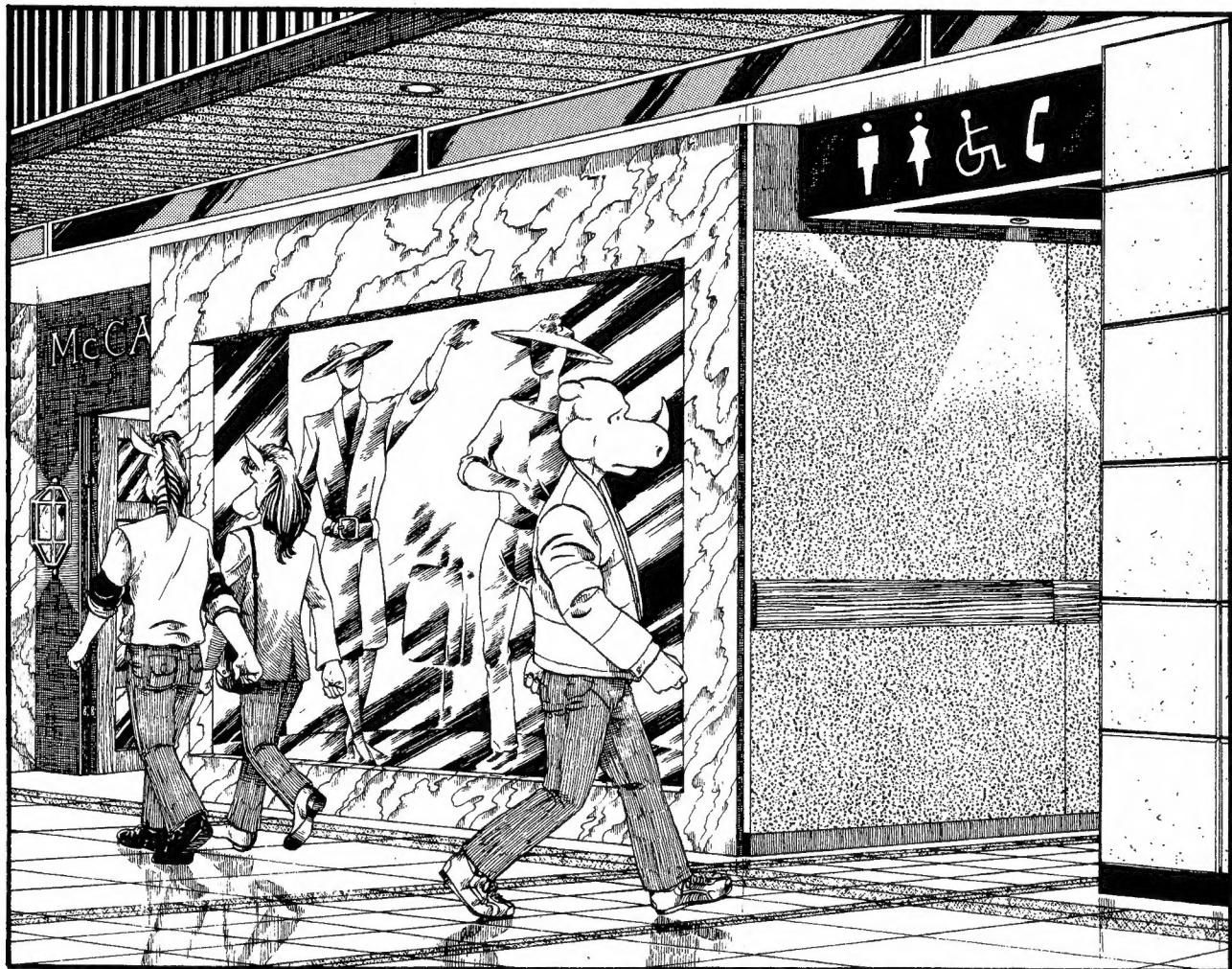
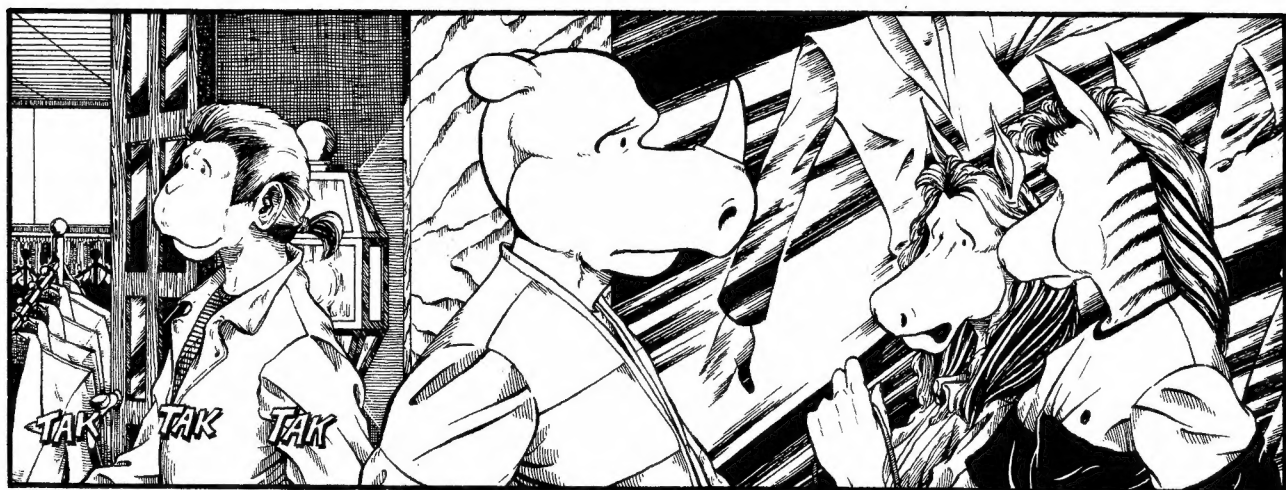


CHAPTER IV  
Straight, No Chaser

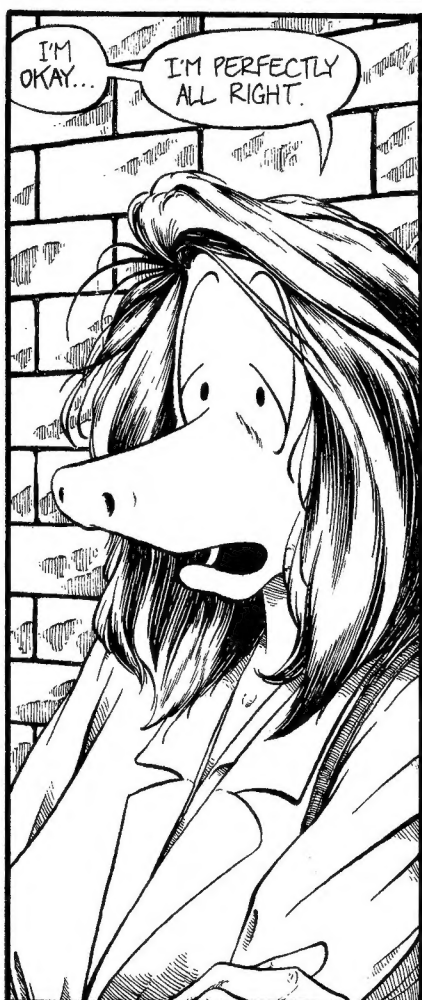
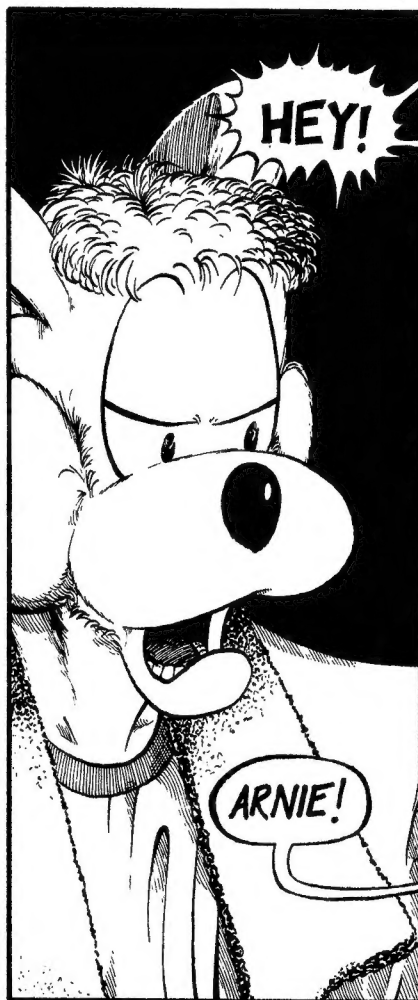
...AND SIXTY-THREE CENTS IS YOUR CHANGE. THANKS A LOT!

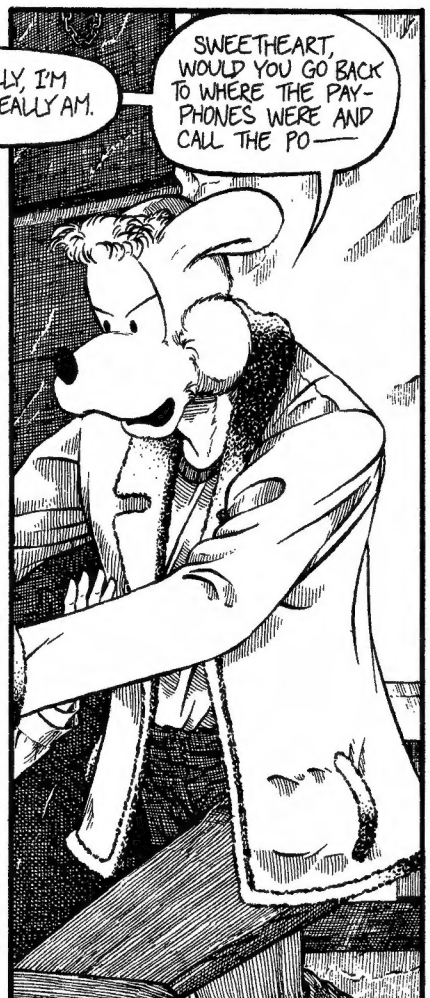




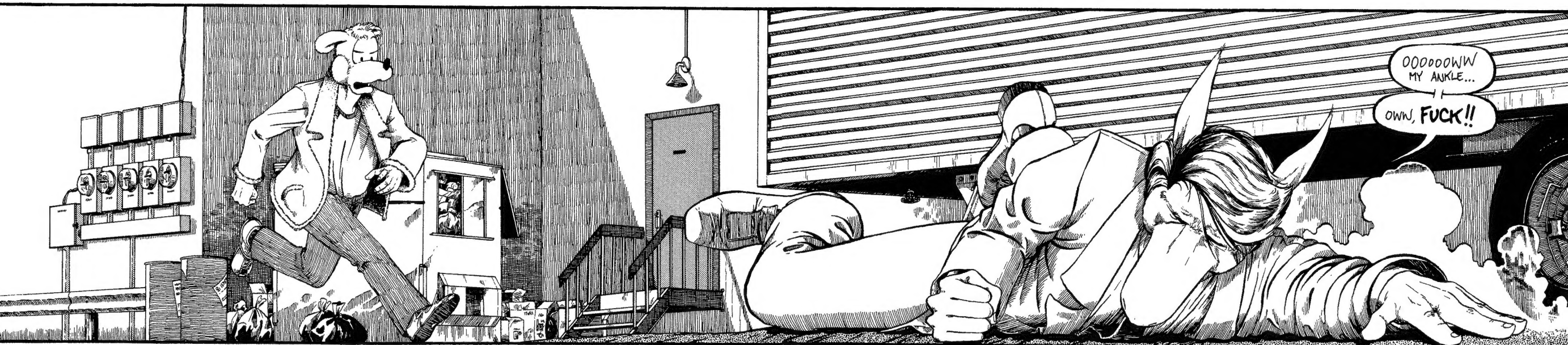
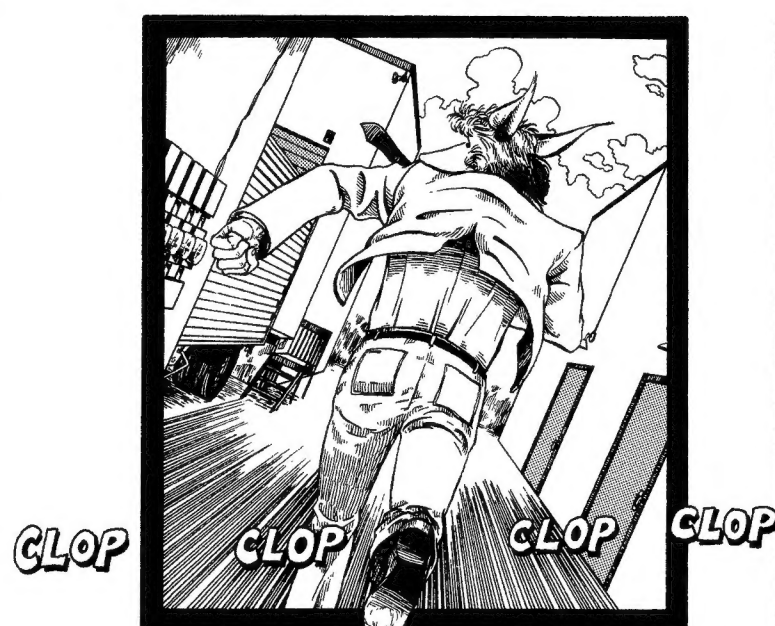
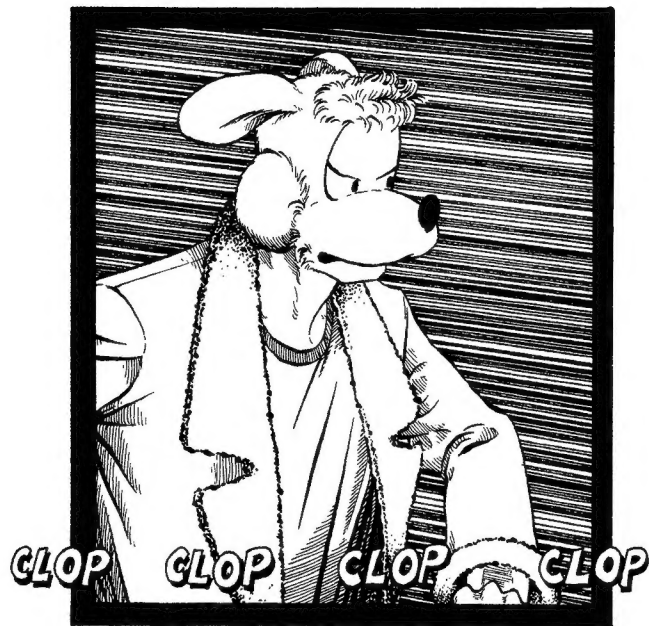










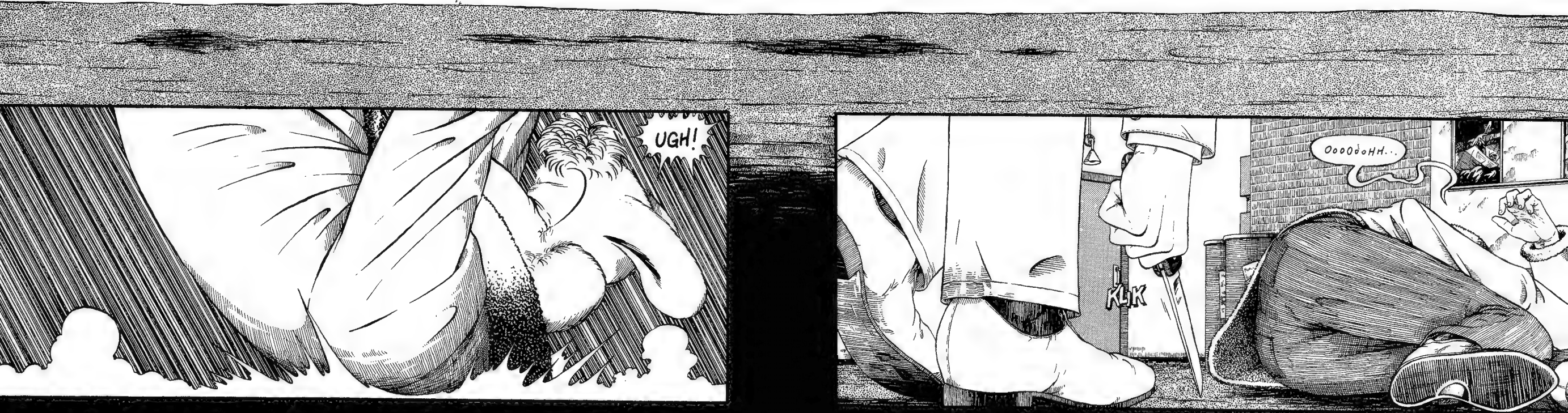
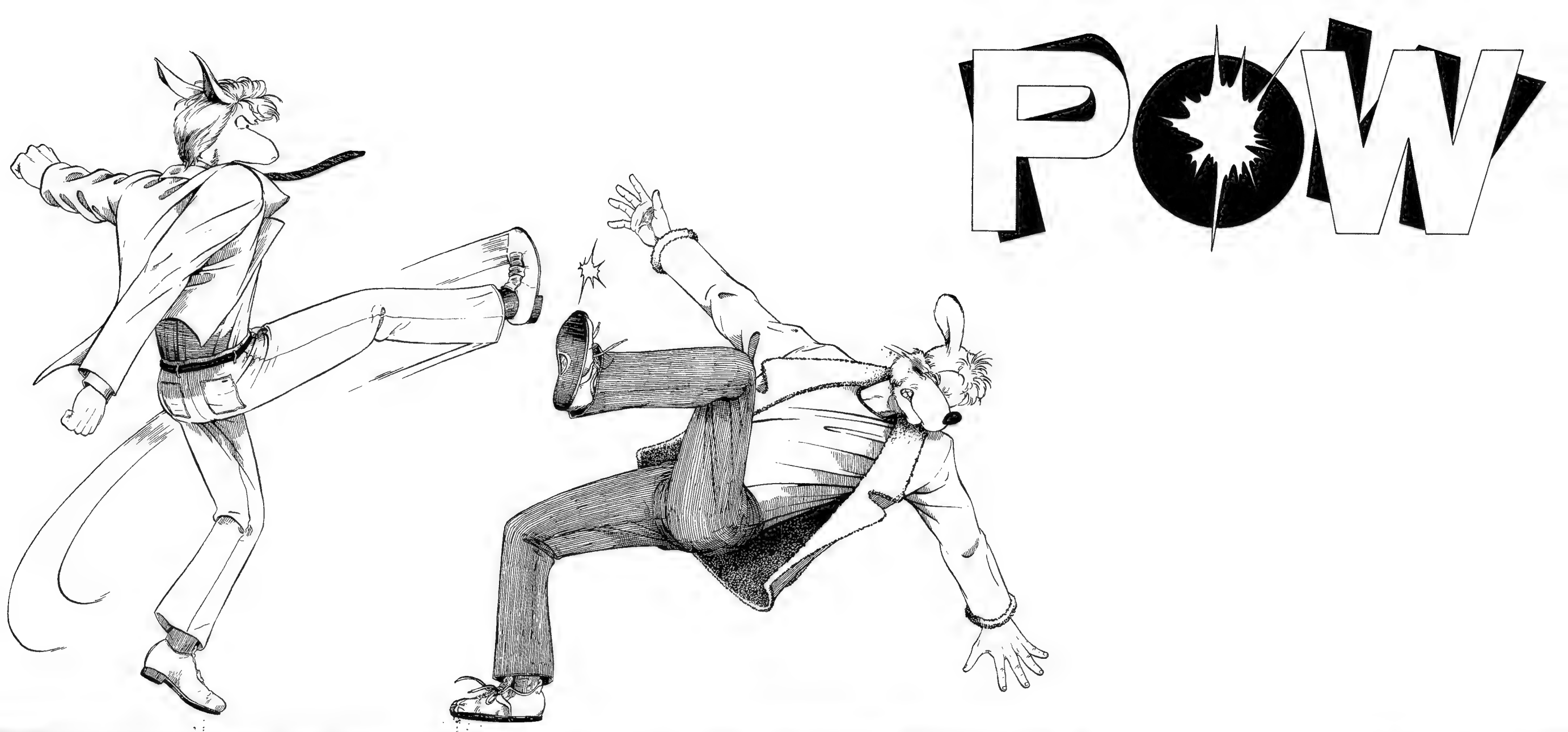




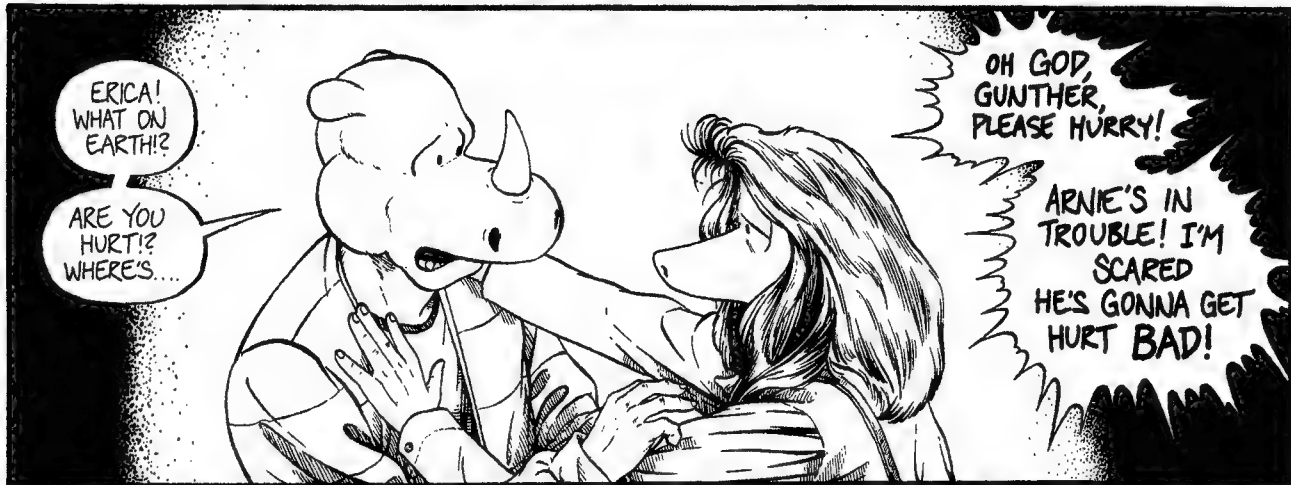
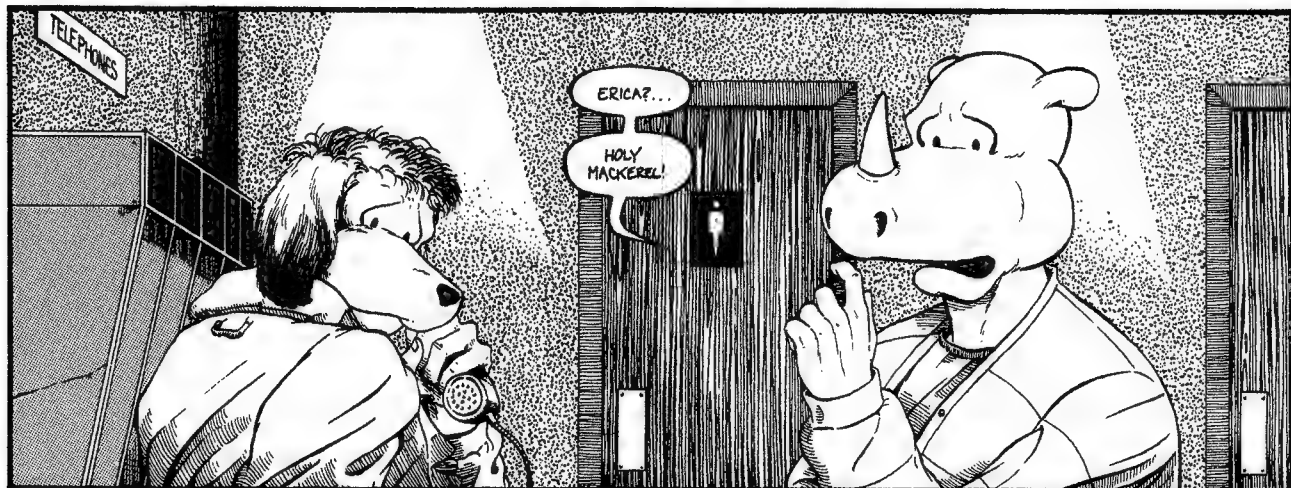
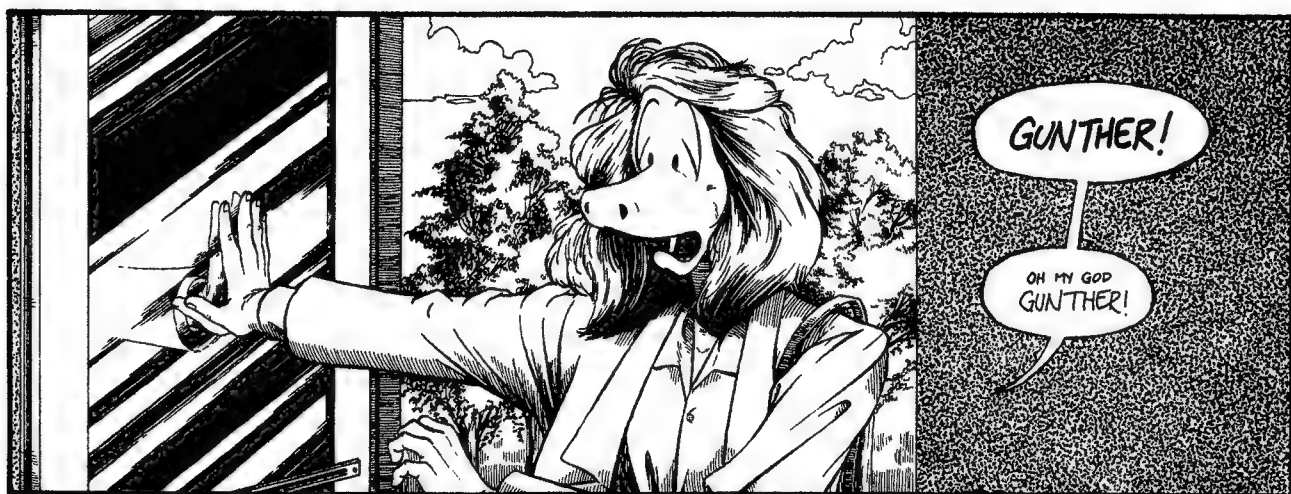


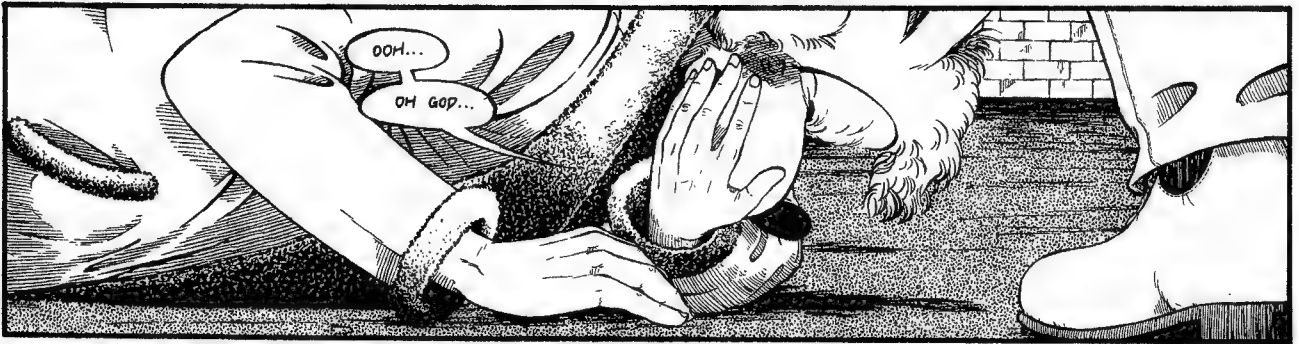


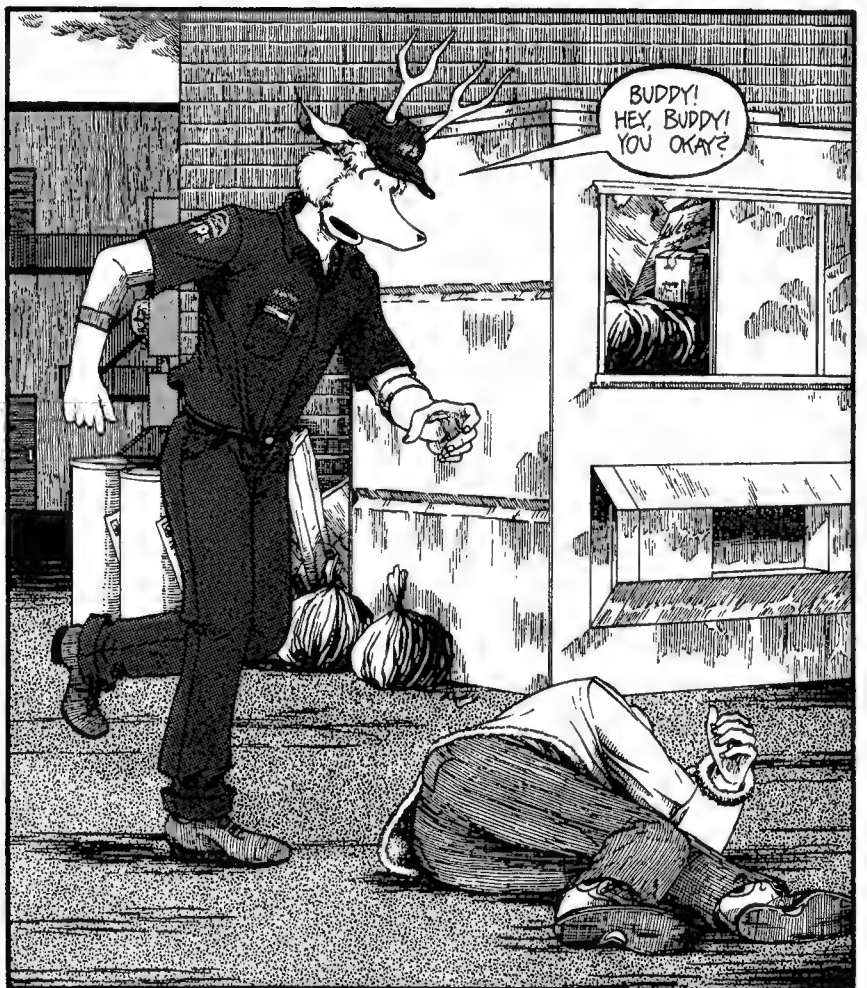
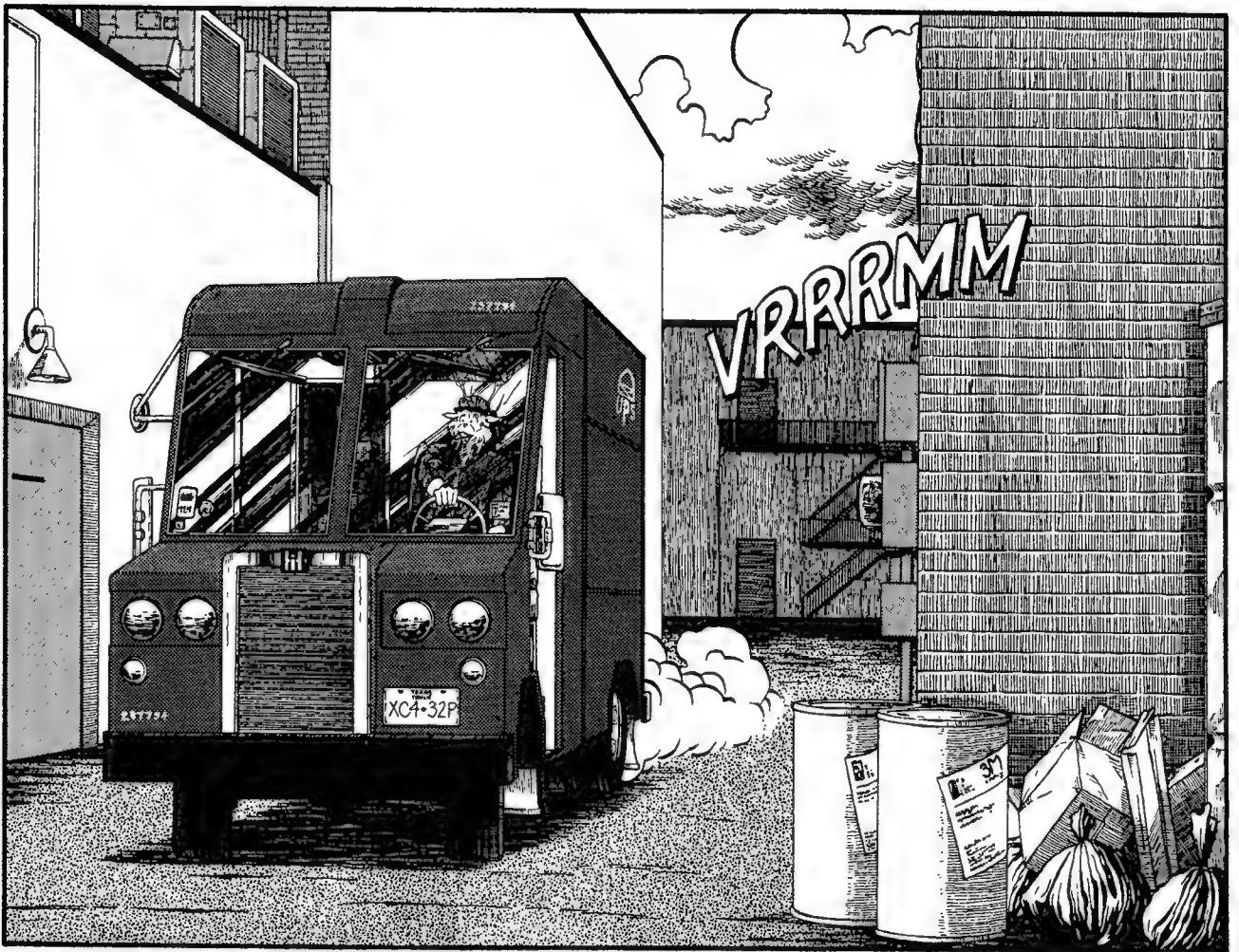




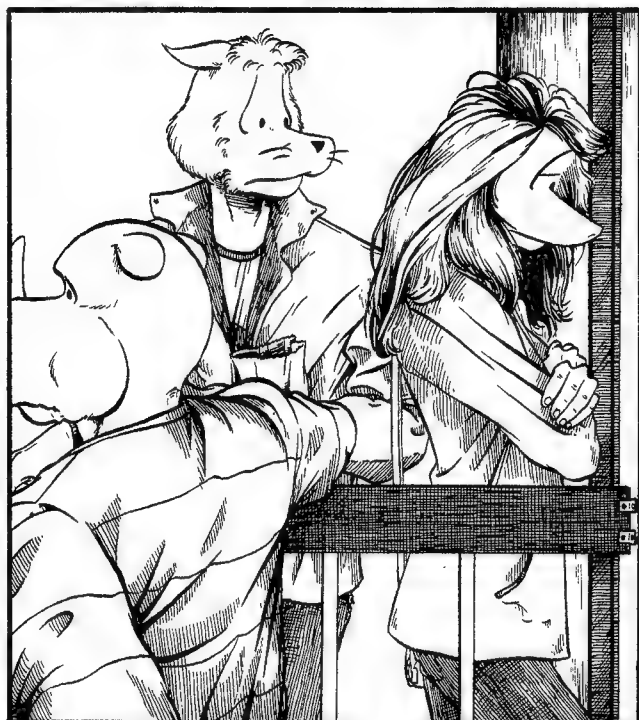
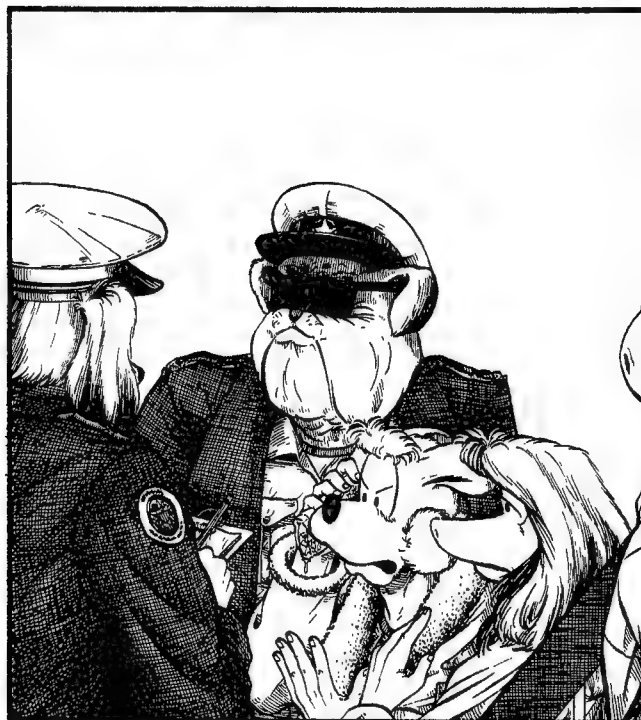
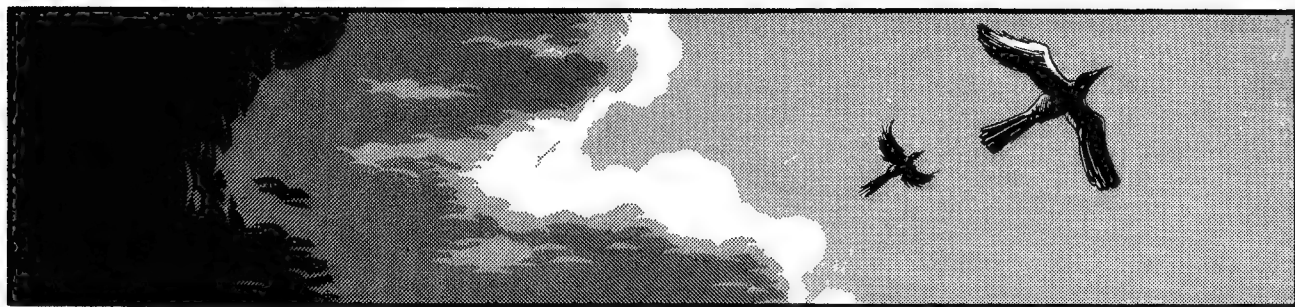


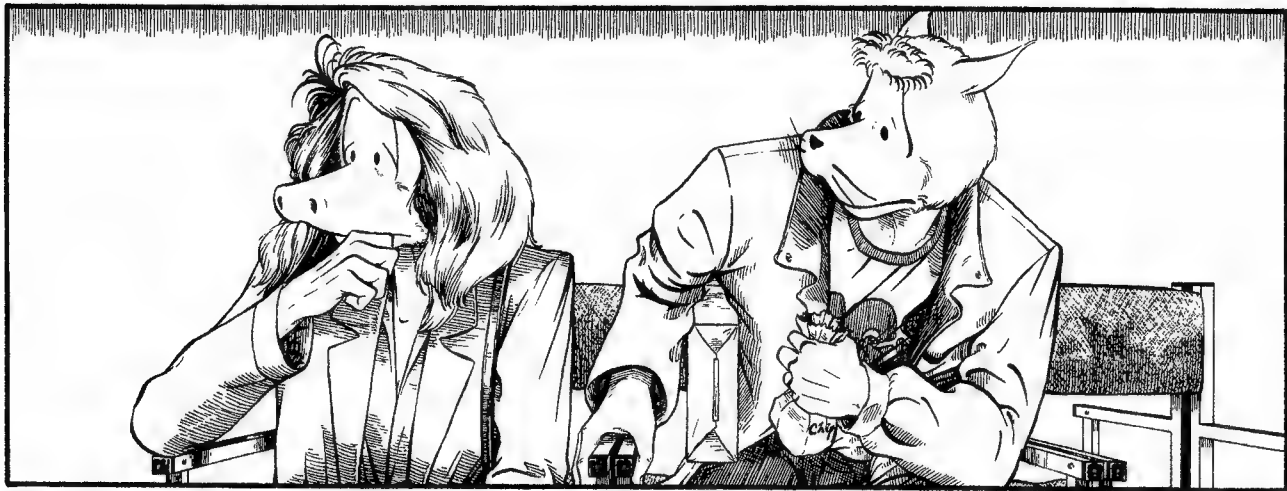
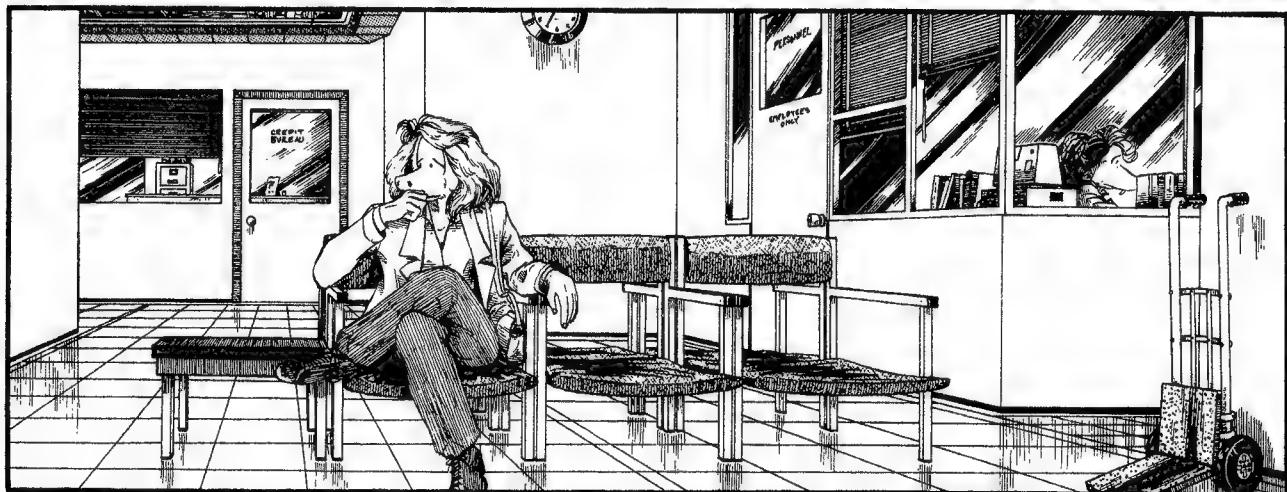
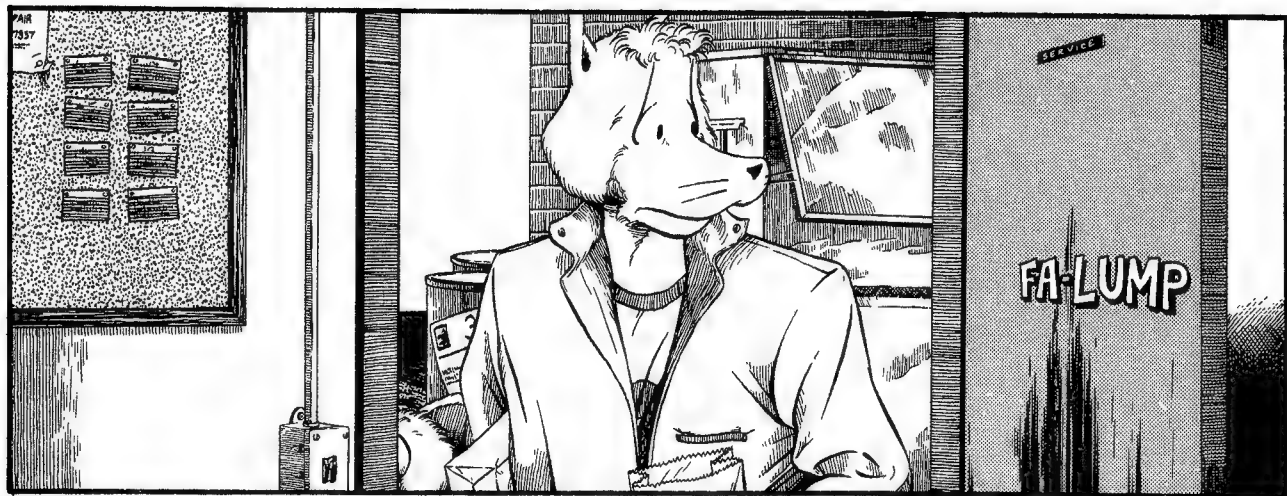


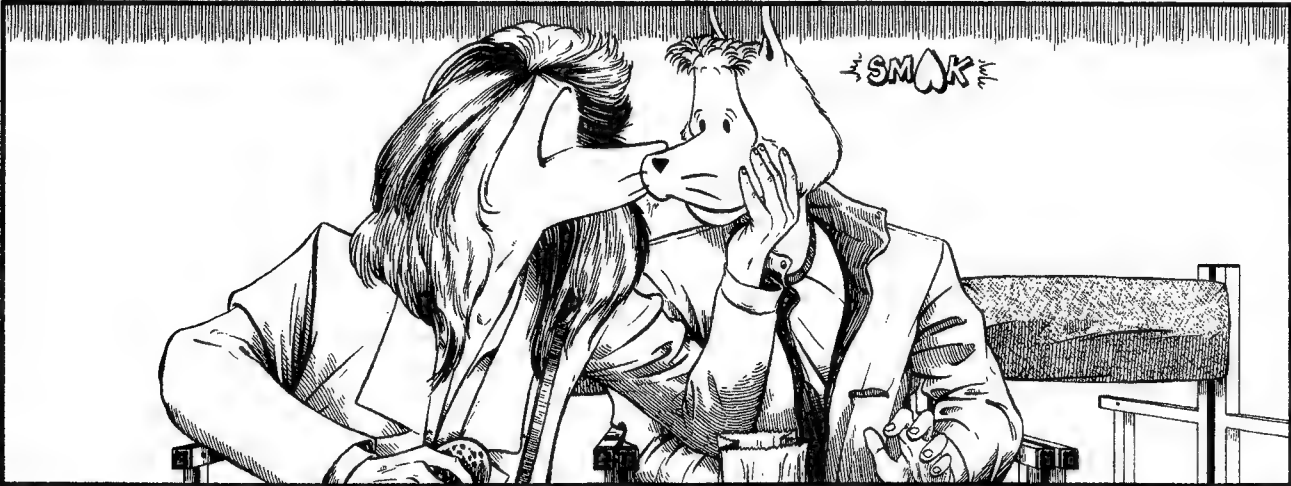
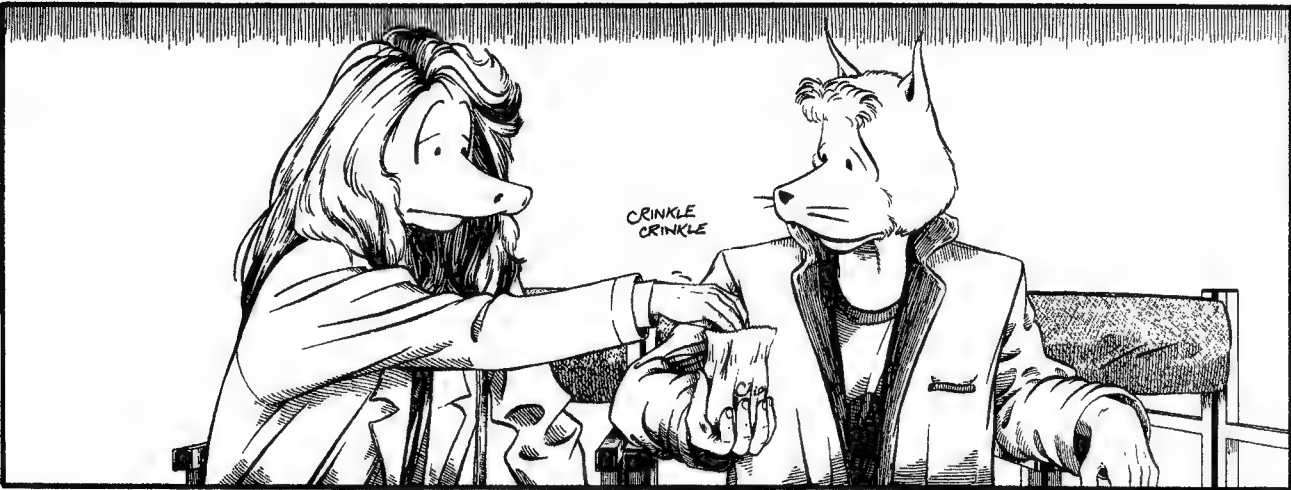




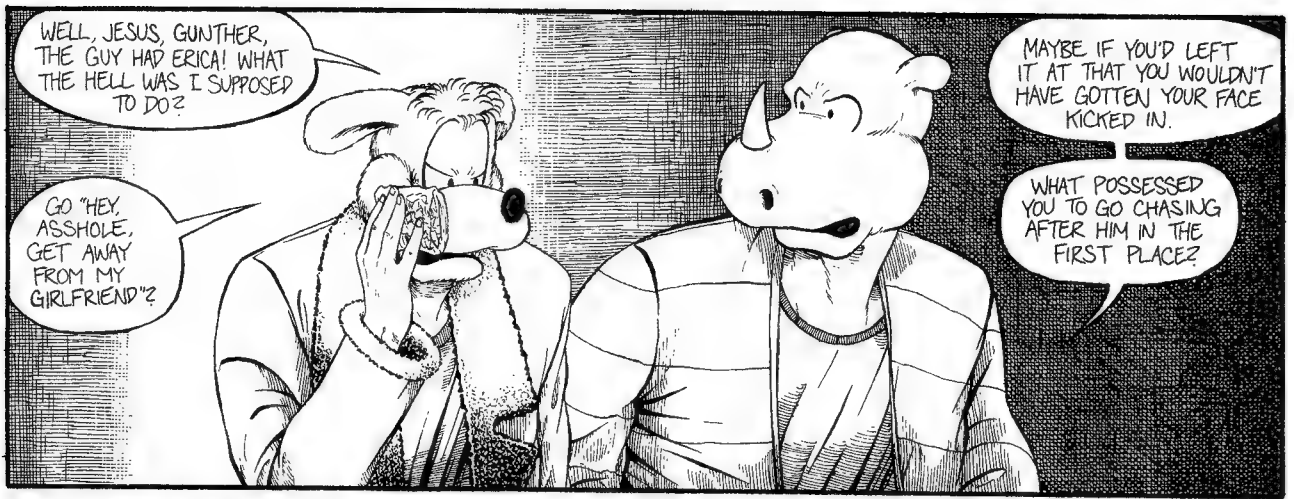




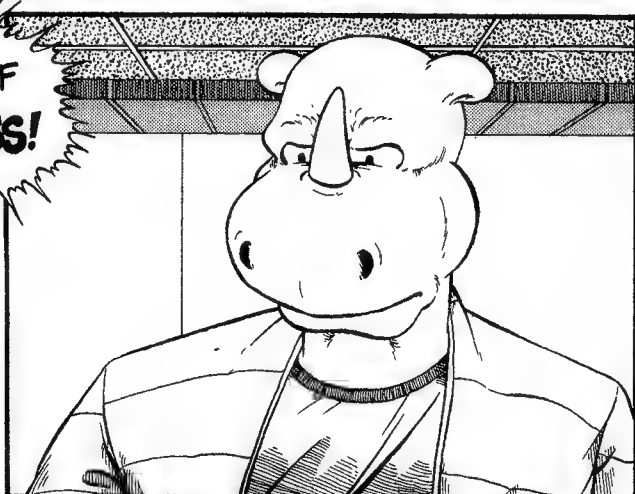
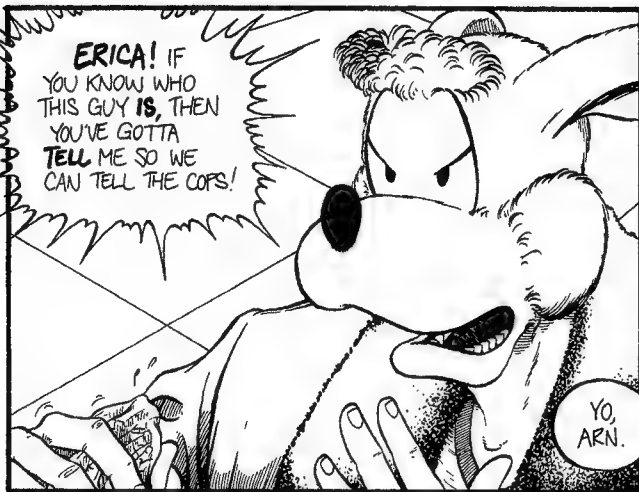
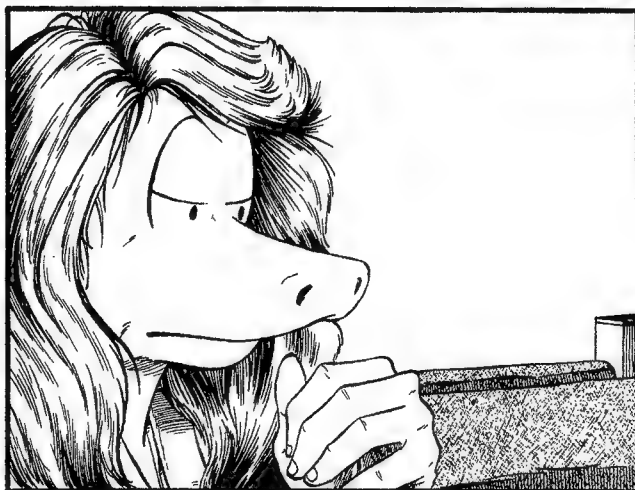
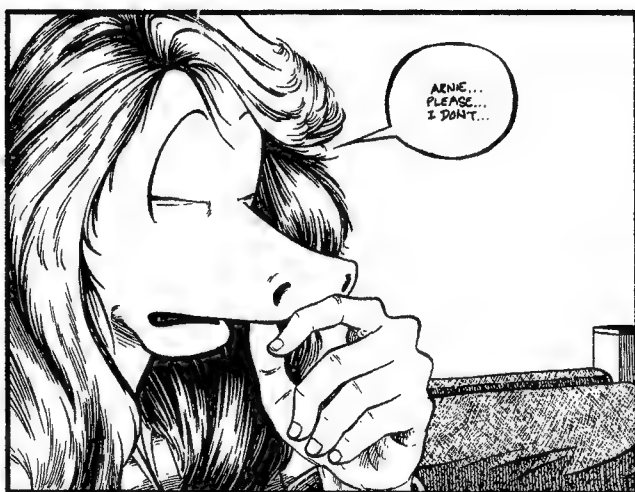




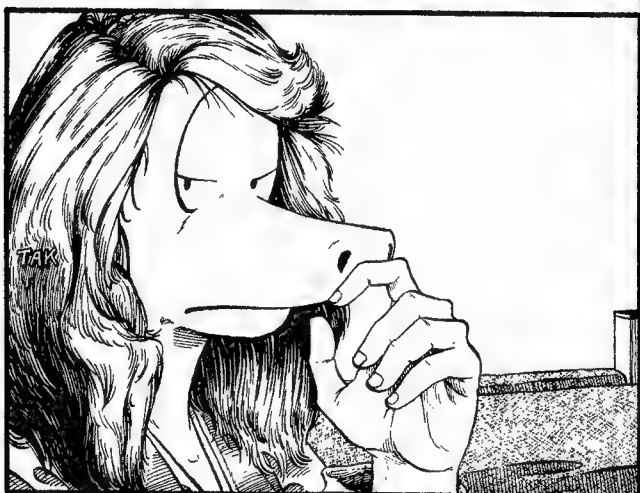
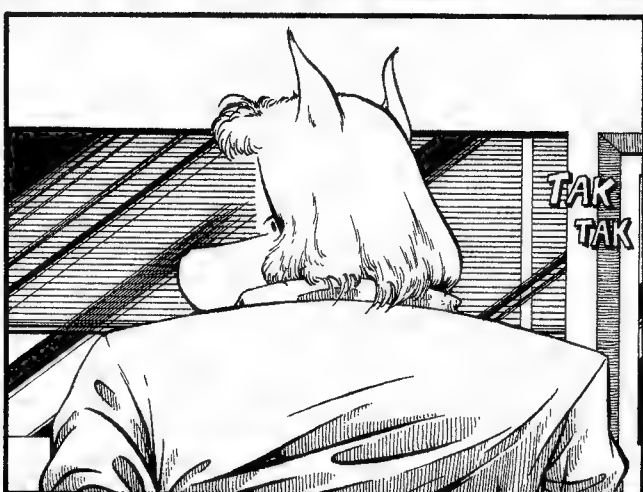
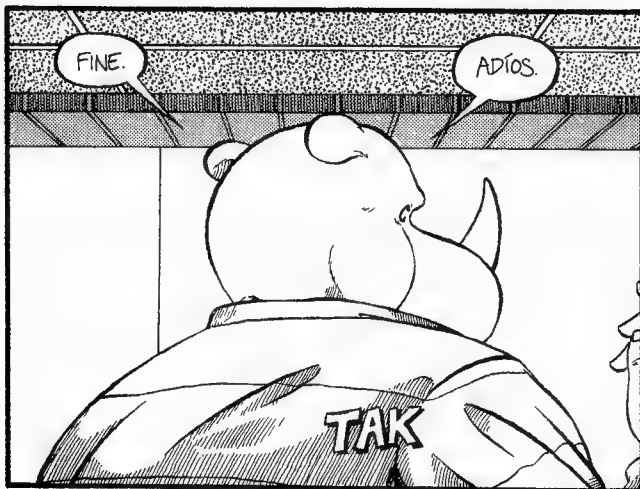












NOTHING, ARNIE.

IT DOESN'T MATTER.



N E X T : Intrusion

# DEAR *hepcats*

7117 WOOD HOLLOW, #1728  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78731

Martin Wagner—

After reading your paragraph underneath the cartoon of a woman's pelvis in chains, I am really curious why you thought women "(that's right)" would be against prostitution being legalized. Most feminists I know are very supportive of legalization, if not for the simple fact that no law should tell us what to do with our bodies, than for the more mundane reasons such as licensing being one way (albeit easily circumvented) to cut down on the spread of VD (testing required), and the fact that pimps only exist because prostitutes are denied the right to protection because of their "criminal" status. Hypocrite politicians can fuck one and then blab morals to his constituents. It's all a bunch of moralistic bullshit. Also, *Hepcats* is fun, a lot like *Omaha* (dancer).

C. ROWLES  
SCHENECTADY, NY

*It's not so much that I found it surprising a woman would support the legalization of prostitution—in fact, the phrase "that's right" should have indicated the idea made perfect sense to me. It was more a response to public preconceptions, which stem directly from several millenia of male-dominated society. Most people who wrote the Texan to say they were shocked, shocked at the editorial seemed to think it was particularly*

*incredible that a woman, of all people, would support something as wholly degrading as prostitution—an attitudinal extension of the idea, all too pervasive in our schizophrenic society, that virtually anything to do with sexual expression is sluttish and degrading to women, though, of course, sexual acrobatics are all well and good for manlymen. "Nice girls don't," you know—the "moralistic bullshit" you're referring to, and a double standard to which, I might add, feminists are in no way immune. For example, though you mention that feminists espouse the idea that "no law should tell us what to do with our bodies," many feminists (though not all) are the first to condemn such things as erotic and X-rated entertainment, nude photography, and even my wife's erstwhile profession, "exotic" dancing—or anything that exhibits women in any light that accentuates their sexuality. (I have never in my life, however, heard a feminist complain about Chippendale's dancers, Playgirl, or Michelangelo's David.) Kate Worley told me recently that one of the hardest things she had to overcome when she started writing *Omaha* was her fear that all her anti-porn NOW friends would anathematize her. Not that I'm calling feminists (or you) raving hypocrites, but it seems to me that the reason some feminists don't want the law telling women what to*

*do with their bodies is that they want that privilege reserved for themselves. To wit, in a recent Daily Texan editorial lambasting a "UT Girls"-type pin-up calendar, the leader of the University NOW wrote something like this: "The women in this calendar aren't real. They're not women." Now, though I'm sure this writer was trying to make a point about the evils of sexual objectification, I thought that her setting herself up as judge and jury of her entire gender and refusing to accord any woman who didn't espouse her views the right to exist was pretty fucking arrogant. Prolix point being that adopting an "ism" is no sure way to protect yourself from double standards, especially when our society today is so rife with them that we're probably inheriting them genetically without knowing it.*

Dear Martin,

First, the business: enclosed is a check for a copy of *Yo*. And could you please write on it somewhere, in big, hard-to-miss letters, DO NOT BEND. The Boston area (or at least the places I've lived in it) seems to be cursed with a bunch of more brainless than usual mail people, some of whom might try to cram it into my little 3 1/2" x 3 1/2" box if not told otherwise.

Now for the comments. It's funny, but I really don't have that much to say about the book. I obviously like it, or I wouldn't keep buying it (or send off for *Yo*, for that matter). I don't like to predict, condemn, applaud, etc. what's going on in a story other than to myself and maybe to my wife. If the writer is any good, any confusing plot twists and such will sort themselves out eventually. As for my liking or not liking parts of the story, well, I'm sure that most writers (if they're really writing for the story and not for the money) don't give two shits if there are a bunch of people who don't like what they have to say. A lot of what writing is is internal, anyway, so praise is nice and condemnation hurts a bit, but in the long run it doesn't mean all that



much.

Anyway, I said I had a comment (The above wasn't it. Don't ask me what it was, tho.), and it's not even about the story. Rather, it's about the little blurb on the last page, about "The New Mommy Goose." So that you don't get the wrong impression, I am *not* defending this dickless wonder. I *cringe* at the thought of what kids brought up on this shit will be like as adults. They'll probably end up as fundamentalists, or some other brainless creatures with both feet in Fantasyland and a big mouth in the real world. *But*, this guy isn't doing anything new. Just look at all the wonderful Disney classics whole generations of us grew up watching (and kids are still growing up on them today). Those are saccharine in Technicolor®. They often bear little resemblance to the Brothers Grimm tales they were based on. (I know, I know, a bunch of them were also from Hans Christian Andersen, but I'm busy making a point here.) And even *those* were watered down versions of the originals that the Brothers Grimm collected on their travels. *They* (the Bros. Grimm) did some of the early diluting! I remember seeing a piece comparing sections from their first, second, and third editions. The same descriptions kept getting shorter and more sanitized. And even then, the final versions were still much more adult than what we had when Disney was done with them. I doubt that many people realize how far from the originals they've come.

A good example is Cinderella. First of all, she used to be Ashpottle, which is kind of like saying (in German) the one who takes out the ashes from the fireplace. Cinderella is really Cinder-Ella, which works out to the same thing. There wasn't a Fairy Godmother, but rather a magical bird who gave her the shoes. The bullshit with the pumpkin and the carriage wasn't anywhere to be found. And the whole thing with fitting into the slipper was totally different. The Prince had tracked Ashpottle to her house, but since she looked a lot

more glamorous when she was "enchanted," he didn't know which of the 3 girls to pick. So he tries the whoever-fits-in-the-slipper routine. *That's* where things change *drastically* from what we're used to. He doesn't do the putting on; the mother does. And when the eldest daughter can't quite fit, she (unseen by the Prince) chops off a couple of her toes. His Airheadedness falls for it, and is walking off prepared to marry the bitch when the magical bird calls out to him from a tree and tells him to look at the shoes. He sees blood streaming out of it and brilliantly figures out he's been duped. Not so brilliantly, he lets momma do the second fitting when he gets back. The second girl doesn't quite fit either, so momma chops off her heel. Airhead doesn't think to check (probably has something to do with all the inbreeding in European royalty and the congenital idiots produced thereby) and is happily strolling to the altar when the bird comes to the rescue again. He goes back a third time and finally gets the right girl. If I were her, I wouldn't want him by that point.

Longwinded point being twofold. One, people all over Europe (and many other places) used to tell these stories to their kids, and two, people in the past hundred years seem to want a more toned-down version (to greatly varying degrees). People then were basically xenophobic and warlike. People now are basically warlike and xenophobic. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Well, that's it for me (whew!). Hope the book brings you some money to go with the letters, headaches, and late nights at the drawing table.

Yours,

ROLAND RAUCH  
DORCHESTER, MA

*Oh, well, speaking as someone who considers all outside interference upon the development of a work of art (including what this industry calls "editing") tantamount to being gang*

*raped by rabid cape buffaloes, I think you make some very good points, but I also think you have to look at intent when stories suddenly crop up in various versions over the years. For example, the 1939 Wizard of Oz movie is a total bastardization of the Baum novel, but it's a timeless piece of cinema; both versions of the tale, Baum's and Fleming's, stand on their own. Also, I tend to be a little more understanding when a story that's been around for hundreds of years undergoes gradual changes due to the ravages of time (say, the Bible) than when a story is obviously and deliberately hacked up in order not to offend some middle-class milquetoast pantywaists. However, who can really say why the Brothers Grimm chose to edit their own collection of stories—unless they tell us why themselves? Still, I'm in total agreement with your apparent point that just because something is changed, under no circumstances should that mean the original forms should cease to exist. In defense of the Disney classics, those are some wonderful old films taken on their own terms, and I'd sooner my kid grew up on them than on the blankety-blank Care Bears. By the same token, if my kid wants to watch cartoons on TV, s/he'll hopefully learn to acquire a taste for my videotape collection of Fleischer/Avery/Warner Bros. classics, and not the safe-as-milk half-hour toy commercials ejaculated forth every Saturday morning by middle-aged balding accountants.*

*And, in closing, your early paragraph concerning opinions and attitudes of writers was on the money; nice letters are always appreciated, but if people don't want to be nice, who cares anyway? Go read Barry Blair. You'll go far in fandom, Roland.*

---

Dear Martin,

Yes, **Hepcats** has even reached Germany! Well, at least it reached me and I like it very much.

After just 4 issues I'm not entirely sure what to make of it, so.

It began as a mostly funny comic, as is expected in a comic featuring mostly animal-characters. Starting with the appearance of Erica and Arnie it has turned into a love story all the while keeping the humor intact. With *Snowblind* you seem at least partly to be heading into the direction of a mystery novel. That is most evident in the mysterious guy Erica flees from in #4. My guess is that he is a member of Erica's family she just doesn't want to meet. He seems to stem from the same race as Erica and really doesn't appear to be unfriendly or threatening from what we see of him.

We'll see.

Having read only two *Omahas* and just getting acquainted to *Cerebus*, I'm just starting to feel comfortable with serious (funny) animal comics but your characterisation and artwork really make it easier for me.

Anyway, I just want you to know that *Hepcats*'s got my attention and so far has kept me very interested and entertained. I'll be with you for the run!

Hey, wait a minute, that sounds like a closing comment! Don't go yet, I'm not finished!

Whew, always in a hurry, you Americans!

You know, I was in your big country on the other side of the ocean for the first time recently. I made a great round trip from New York to L.A. (couldn't make it to Texas, so), got my hands on some independents you seldom get over here (mostly *Love and Rockets* and the aforementioned *Cerebus*) and generally spent an awful lot of money. But guess how many dollars lurked in my purse and wanted to be spent?

Yes, in one of those strange and frightening coincidences, it were exactly those 11\$ I have enclosed with this letter! Well, you know what I'm getting at.

To shorten a long story, please send me *Yo*. Although, could you do me the great favor and sign it for me? It's nearly impossible for us German comic fans to get autographs for our

favorite comics. I'd greatly appreciate it!

Just one more thing!

As comic-editor of a German fanzine I know the hardships of private publishing. When I look at *Hepcats*, I really admire how you keep your standard. In #4 you give us 22 pages, color-cover and -backcover, a beautiful title-page and 10 pages of editorial material. You should know someone noticed the fantastic job Double Diamond Press is doing!

Stay Hep!

JÖRG KRISMANN  
WERL-BÜDERICH,  
WEST GERMANY

*You mean you came all the way to the States and you missed Texas? Well, Herr Krismann, you blew the whole trip. But that's all right. The last time I was in Germany was around 1971 or so, when I recall stopping through Frankfurt with my parents. But if Tif and I make it back that way soon (say, before the year 2010), you'll be the first to know. Oh, and tell all your fanzine pals we said hello.*

Mr. Wagner—

Or may I call you Martin? I would be so happy to get a copy of *Yo: The First Hepcats Book*. I want to tell you that I thought including your wedding photos helped readers to relate to the comic strip (book) better. What exactly do you call your series? I don't consider it a comic strip or just a book! Do you know that I've already convinced 3 people to try *Hepcats*. My mother even was interested in it. She doesn't like anything I do, usually. Another question, what type of animal is Erica? I've been trying to figure out if she has a bill or a beak? I do believe animals have personalities. If my 3 dogs could talk! Every time we leave the house my mom says to them (the dogs) "We'll be right back, girls!" I can see the dogs saying "yeh, right toots, what do I look like a moron?" I know it must have been scary in the

beginning, but as they say in the Virginia Slims cigarette ad "You've come a long way baby!" Good luck with future issues. Best wishes to you & Tif.

TRACY BENKOVITZ  
TAMPA, FL

*The ubiquitous Darrel Boatz, of Comics Interview fame, thinks Erica's a platypus. Which is okay by me, but she has a much nicer waistline, you know.... Oh, well.*

*Oh, by the way, what must have been scary in the beginning?*

Dear Mr. Wagner,

Enclosed is my money order for \$11.00 for one copy of *Yo*. Please send it to the address below.

Just a quick note, while I'm here. I think your book is quite well done, in several different ways. The art is smooth and polished, the pacing is very refined, and the brevity, in the lack of unnecessary word balloons or faked, artificial dialogue, is refreshing. The characters are also human and realistic enough to be interesting.

You've got my curiosity aroused enough to buy the next 17 issues as they come out, at any rate. Keep up the good work.

VIC CASSEN  
SEATTLE, WA

*Swell. Hope you don't plan to stop then!*

Yo, Martin—

I'd been meaning to drop you a line anyway about *Yo*, but the work has been taking too much time. Running into the first three issues of *Hepcats* coincided with me finishing the first draft of the new book (a fantasy murder mystery; it should be out from Ace in late 1990 or early 1991); hence the letter.

As promised, I gave the autographed copies of the Sunday section to Reed and Kate, both of whom were awfully impressed. As well they should be.

I really like the books a lot,

although I don't see but the most superficial comparisons to Reed and Kate's *Omaha*—Reed's art is a lot more classic than cinematic (there's nothing wrong with either, mind, but they are different), and the pacing of your story tends to be slower and more gradual than Kate's (ditto).

My only complaint is the obvious one, that we haven't seen the last of the terrorism story—when is it coming out?

All told, neat stuff; keep it up. I do think, though, that your time doing the four-panel strip served you well, as it seems to have given you a different sort of control of pacing than the usual. Works nicely.

And congratulations on the marriage. Felicia and I just celebrated our eleventh anniversary. It's been pretty neat. So far.

Sincere best to you and Tifanie,

JOEL ROSENBERG  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

P.S. As far as Armadillocon goes, *illegitimi non carborundum*, eh?

*Joel—for those of you who don't read unillustrated books—is a hotshot SF and fantasy writer who has authored such entertaining adventures as Not for Glory. I met him Thanksgiving 1988 at a con in Houston, where I only had Yo and some copies of the aforementioned Daily Texan color comics section (which I edited, so I really really am sympathetic to editors, don't you know) to sign. Joel, I hear you've just been babied. Congratulations! Joel's a man of great creative energy, folks. Not only can he turn a phrase in Latin; he plays a mean game of shufflepuck to boot.*

*I enjoyed meeting Reed and Kate in Dallas in March. Say hi for me when you get a chance, will you?*

*And, oh yes, I recently got an invitation to this year's Armadillocon. What should I do with it?*

Dear Martin,

Well, I hope I'm not too late to pick up a copy of *Yo* from you guys.

I'm a student here in Austin and lately have been procrastinating away just about everything but school. Lucky me, eh?

I just finished reading your comments concerning the *Chronicle* and Mr. "Bonehead" Weaver (after reading *Into the Pavilions* first of course). I've lived in Austin less than a year & have thoroughly enjoyed reading the *Chronicle* ever since I moved here. It's wonderful to see a newspaper willing to discuss important issues such as the environment. A friend of mine who works at HEB told me earlier tonight that sales definitely dropped the week after they removed it from their store. People were coming into the store and saying they'll never shop there again.

Which brings me to another issue close to that vein...ACTV (channel 10 locally) is being attacked by Mayor Lee Cooke concerning the issue of nudity on their channel. It pleases me to know that the city council has solved so many internal problems facing the city that they can spend time arguing about a pair of tits on T.V. Cooke is threatening to shut down numerous programs run on Austin Public Access Television. Which has me wondering what's the point of civil liberties if the [government's] whim can radically regulate things such as freedom of speech? After all, if I'm not mistaken, I believe there's a city ordinance in Austin which allows for women to expose their chests in public!

I'm just tired of these Mark Weavertypes, including organizations like PMRC, trying to force their morality on everyone else.

Best wishes,

DAVID BRISCOE  
AUSTIN

PS—I'm calling our mayor tomorrow!

*Give him my love. And, uh, double-check on that ordinance while you're at it.*

*Here's a fun fact about our local moral terrorist Weaver that non-Austin residents may find amusing.*

*At a gay rights rally on the Capitol grounds some time ago, Weaver—who was on hand as usual with his gang of yuppie stormtroopers-for-Jesus waving signs like "Gay Is Not O.K." and "Got AIDS Yet?"—approached a Presbyterian minister who was marching on behalf of the homosexual community and asked him just what he was doing marching with all of these sinners. When the minister replied, "Are any of us without sin?", Weaver snapped back, "I am!"*

*But there's just one thing I'm curious about. Did you ever think to wonder just what kind of a supposedly anti-gay, anti-porn holy vigilante would spend his time hanging out in peep shows with a camera, looking for two guys in flagrante delicto to take pictures of!?*

Dear Martin,

Thank you for such a wonderful comic as *Hepcats*. There is so little comparable material on the market, it's sad. At this point, I have stopped collecting half the DC/Marvel that I used to, and am starting to branch into independents. On the other hand, there is still plenty of trash in that area; thankfully *Hepcats* is *not* in that category!

Enclosed is a check for \$11 for a copy of *Yo*. Consider me an eternal *Hepcats* fan.

Yours,

ROBERT CARRAGHER  
LA JOLLA, CA

*And 2.75 million copies of Spider-Man #1 out there. Sigh. Stay sane, Robert; I need guys like you.*

**DEALERS! YO! Are you selling out of *Hepcats*, trying to re-order, and getting the old we-can't-get-any routine from your distributor? Well, hell, write DDP at the address at the beginning of this column, and we'll fix you up ourselves! Don't be out of *Hepcats*! Period!**



# THE CONTINUING CRISIS

All right. So by now you've heard me bitch and whine and complain about how bad the black and white comics market is right now. *Come on, Martin*, I'm sure you're saying, *how bad is it, really?* It's bad. And if you don't believe me, just read a few selected letters from your fellow Hepfans.

Dear Mr. Wagner,

I'm on a fact-finding mission and it appears that I've finally had to write to you to get any facts. I first heard about your title **Hepcats** in the *Advance Comics* flyer. I added it to my list at my subscription service to give it a try, but have received nothing through them. I managed to track down issue 2 and that's it. I still see every issue listed in *Advance Comics* but my service knows nothing of you, the local specialty stores know nothing of you, and in the meantime I get no **Hepcats**.

Please, at your convenience, respond to the above address.

1) Is **Hepcats** still being produced and, if so, what issue is it on?

2) Are back issues available through you or a dealer that you know of?

3) Do you offer subscriptions?

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

SCOTT A. WILHELM  
YUBA CITY, CA

Dear Mr. Wagner,

Please note the date of this letter [1/10/90, arrived here 1/13]. Just yesterday, I picked up an issue of **Hepcats** #2. The shop I got it at had no idea what it was, as he was more involved with the Marvel and DC Comics lines. Despite my location in the San Francisco Bay Area, your comix is an anomaly. Comix and Comics had never heard of you, Comic Relief professes ignorance, SF Comic Book Company sluffs it off. I also have contact with Last Gasp, Rip Off Press and Kitchen Sink, but if it isn't in the catalog, I can't order it.

I was attracted to [**Hepcats**] by

the artistic approach and the story. Even though it has similarities to *Omaha* and *Melody*, it's as far removed from those as Texas is from California. I'm now quite hooked on **Hepcats**, so now comes 20 QUESTIONS (Actually, closer to six).

1) As of today's date, how many issues are out?

2) Are they still available? (3800 isn't much of a press run, even for an underground)

3) If still available, prices, please?

4) You talk about running *Snowblind* to issue 20, and since the hot, new item is subscriptions, will one be available?

5) *Omaha* put their adventures into squareback paper and hardbound books. Any ideas on that for **Hepcats**?

6) What's the poop on *Yo*? Still extant?

I hope this doesn't come across like the Spanish Inquisition, but I really dislike having good comix pass me by because I didn't know they were out there. Thank you for your time and efforts in answering my queries. Best of luck in your endeavors.

Respectfully yours,

PATRIC CONROY  
WALNUT CREEK, CA

*These letters, which arrived within a week of each other, illustrate succinctly exactly what it is that makes it so hard for independents like myself and others to get a foothold in this industry—and they are also part of the reason that I have decided to push subscriptions heavily, starting last issue. (Mssrs. Wilhelm and Conroy have since become subscribers.)*

*The fact is, as I'm sure a lot of*

*you know, that what you do and don't get to read out there in Comixland is determined solely by retailers with both eyes on their account books.*

*Though it's very true that comics and comics publishers with a firm track record are going to be more appealing to retailers than those of us just getting started (indeed, considering also that retailers must buy their stock three months in advance, sight unseen, and non-returnable), I have had solid testimony from good retailers to the fact that when a book is promoted, a book will sell. Even little **Hepcats**. More on that later.*

*Now, I must interrupt myself to qualify this criticism of some retailers by saying that, in fact, most retailers whom I have ever dealt with have been really swell guys, fair, reasonable, and friendly. It's true that many retailers ignore books like **Hepcats** because their clientele are strictly Punisher geeks. It's true that many retailers ignore it because they have to look at their established pattern of sales and buy only what they have capital for and only what they know they can sell.*

*But it's also true that some retailers ignore indies because they're anal-retentive morons.*

*For example, Scott's retailers, who refuse to get him **Hepcats**—indeed, Scott says they "know nothing of" the book—even though he specifically lists it on his subscription service. In my opinion, that's shitty customer service and Scott should patronize someone else. In another letter, my Queens superfan Bob Fonda confessed he "had to try everything short of water torture" to get his retailers to order **Hepcats**. To quote Natalie Merchant, "What's the matter here?" Does it just not occur to some retailers that if a customer puts a book on his subscription list,*

it probably means he or she wants to buy it!? You'd think that if there were one concept in the world these guys could relate to, that'd be it. Does it also not occur to them that, as retailers, they have an obligation to provide good customer service if they want these people to come back? I mean, I try to imagine some comic retailers having another—any other—job and I laugh like hell. "All right, ya want the 20 oz. New York strip with bemaïse sauce and a glass of 1983 Moët, chilled? Nope, ya can't have it! I'll bring ya a cheeseburger, and dat's it."

So you see, a lot of retailers simply don't want you to have a choice. It's buy what they like or buy nothing at all.

And I could go on for pages about the weasels who order two copies, sell out instantaneously, of course, yet never increase their order. Grrr.

Another thing that you all should realize. When a retailer tells you he won't order indies because he was "burned by the glut," then he's a dishonest fuck and you should never shop at his store as long as you live. Let me explain what the glut was. The glut was pure and simple greed, speculation gone mad. What happened was that in the mid-'80s, some black-and-white titles became popular enough that early issues appreciated on the collector's market (the biggest scourge to this industry since since Fred Wertham) very rapidly. Some retailers saw this, went "Wow!", and over-ordered on independents they had never heard of with the hope they'd be speculating on the next TMNT. When all these books hit their stores and turned out to be unsaleably amateurish crap, well, naturally, these guys shifted the blame to all those crappy independents out there cluttering the market. The fact that no one twisted their arms to order books they knew nothing about in quantities of 75 and 100, and that their own speculating brought about their fall, is, needless to say, too painful to bear. So, to this day, you'll still hear these losers

hurling invective at every comic book in existence that doesn't have a big fat Marvel or DC logo splashed across it.

(Actually, you'll hear many stories about how the glut came about. My first printer told me that it was part of a consortium between distributors and the Bigtwo to quash all these annoying pesky indies—not totally inconceivable at the time, considering a number of both lame and potentially good indies were, as a result of the above story, still filling catalogs but getting no further than the solicitation stage. Bud Plant, Inc., about whom you always hear fulsome praise, earned my first printer's eternal enmity by, allegedly, using his promotional flyers as box liners [common practice, actually]; telling people his book didn't exist, as he learned one day when he called posing as a dealer; and an incident in which a warehouse worker speculated on his first issue and stole 50 copies right out of the box. Also, Plant's quote to the effect that he wished all black and white indies would "fall into the ocean" didn't help.)

On a positive note, Comics and Comix, with seven stores in sunny California, has recently contacted me about doing a special **Hepcats** promotion.

Dear Mr. Wagner,

I am a desperate man. You have become my very last hope. But let me start at the beginning:

Some time ago, I encountered your Single Page which appeared in an issue of the reprint book, *Cerebus Bi-Weekly*. I knew that this was more than just a two-bit column by some pimply teenager frustrated with sex, drugs, and basically life in general. No, this was a class act, and I was determined to track down the first issue when it hit the stands. Luckily, I happened to be in the right place at the right time. I was in a store in South Norwalk, basically just checking the place out, when a brightly colored cover caught my eye; the cover to #1. I nearly drooled over the

comic as my fingers flipped through the pages with lightning speed. This was even better than the Single Page. Hell, this was the best comic I've read all year. And just as I dashed to the cash register with my find, I heard the manager complaining about the lack of interest in the comic. Apparently, not a single soul besides himself had even bought a copy. Needless to say, he was pleasantly surprised when I handed him my small stack of comics. On the top were the two copies I had picked to buy of the first issue. Upon being asked as to why I wanted two copies, I told him simply that I wanted to support you, Mr. Wagner, as much as my measly pocket of money could. That satisfied him a great deal.

Anyway, that same manager was unable to order any copies of #2, but he has managed to get #'s 3 and 4 for me. But the worst is yet to come. Upon my next visit to the store, the manager informed me that he could no longer afford to order **Hepcats** at all. Store policy required he order at the least ten copies of a comic, and all he'd been able to sell were three copies an issue, two to me and one for himself. I've never been back to the store, as you were the only reason I went in the first place.

In Dave Sim's Letter from the President in a recent issue of *Cerebus*, he wrote that he received his copy of **Hepcats** #5. Please, Mr. Wagner, is there any possible way in the world that you could perhaps ship me a copy through the mail, I'd be more than grateful. And I'd pay any price. I hate to ask like this, but I've run out of options. I've checked every single store in Connecticut within an hour time radius with no luck. And of course I'm also fervently in need of #2. Thank you for your time, Mr. Wagner, I truly am sorry to ask for your help in such a disrespectful way. I promise I will pay full shipping cost, if such a thing could be done for me. Once I have enough money, I'll also purchase a copy of **Yo**, if you still have any. If you could just respond with a small note, I

would be more than grateful.

Signed,

MICHAEL PARKIN  
DANBURY, CT

PS—Congratulations on your wedding! (and I know it's a really late well-wishing)

PPS—Have you ever heard of George N. Parks?

*Disrespectful!? Hardly! (Needless to say, I wrote Mr. Parkin back forthwith.) Uh, and no, George N. Parks rings no bell with me.*

So how about this comic shop, hey, people? Really, I'm sorry **Hepcats** wasn't a seller for him, though as far as I'm concerned, it's his own damn fault. After all, it doesn't exactly sound as if he went out of his way to promote the book to his customers. In fact, he sounds exactly like the sort of dealer who thinks that his job ends with unpacking boxes; it is then up to the books to leap from the shelves into customers' arms and sell themselves.

Sorry if I'm getting overly sarcastic here. Let's just say I'm sick of excuses from dealers who whine and bitch that they just can't sell independents. I know, in some areas, it's true: some conscientious retailer will bust his ass doing all he can to interest his customers in cool alternative stuff, yet nothing registers in the glassy, half-lidded eyes of the Marvel zombies shuffling past his counter, arms outstretched, muttering gibberish. Then again, if Mr. Parkins' letter is any indication, this retailer's ass didn't leave its cushy stool (no pun intended, but I'll give it to you). And I have it on record that every single time—every single time—a retailer has actively promoted **Hepcats** in-store, the result has been an increase in sales, and sometimes, a dramatic one. Ben Biggs, of Lafayette's Bigg Comics (yes, Ben, I'll get to your letter next issue) has promoted **Hepcats** so aggressively I'd put him on the DDP payroll as a pitchman, if DDP had a payroll. (Admittedly, Ben has gone above and beyond the call of duty,

giving copies away free, having an 8-foot banner made by friends, and writing a two-page review of the comic for Lafayette's daily paper, among other things. His unusual resources notwithstanding, he gets things done, and he would probably sell **Hepcats** by running out in front of cars on the freeway if he had to and ordering the driver to buy the book at gunpoint...well, maybe he wouldn't go that far.) The result: Ben sells more **Hepcats** than many Marvel books. Rah rah, Ben! On a much simpler scale, I met a wonderful young lady in San Diego (hi, Catherine...it is Catherine, right?) who used to work for a store in Orange County. One week, for the hell of it, they made **Hepcats** their "Pick of the Week." They had to reorder three times. It doesn't take that much, folks. And yet here's this guy in Connecticut throwing in the towel.

Quite frankly, Michael, this retailer fed you a lot of nonsense about not being able to afford to order **Hepcats** any more. Since you don't indicate he was the one who came up with this ridiculous "policy," I'm not going to criticize him personally, and he may well believe there's some validity to it. But most commonly, this is the sort of ruse dealers spout to get indie comix fans out of their store and indie comix off their racks, so they can cram them full of the next Marvel cash cow. And since the average comix fan is perforce ignorant of direct market economics, most fans don't press the issue and leave the shops with shrugs. But that isn't how it works.

As I understand it, with some exceptions, comic shops are given discounts on their orders based upon the cumulative total of the order—Marvel, DC, and everybody else—determined by a wholesale dollar figure as opposed to a strict quota of copies. Quantity comes into it, but it's the dollar figure that counts. For most comic shops, this discount comes to half cover price (50%). Shops which order massive quantities of stuff—chain stores, mostly—

will usually get a few percentage points more deducted. For one example, in June, orders on Spider-Man #1 were so vast that even a small shop like Bigg Comics had its discount dropped to 55% that month. (Ben, I hope you don't mind my using you as an example.)

So you see, it really doesn't matter if a shop orders one or 100 copies of **Hepcats**. If the cumulative total of the order falls within the mean, the discount is the same.

So if the "policy" of this Connecticut retailer isn't already starting to show at the seams, let's look at it a little more closely. This policy only achieves one thing: it keeps money out of the retailer's till. (Mr. Parkin himself stated he no longer patronizes the store.) Most comic retailers, when they note they're selling only, say, three copies of a \$2.00 comic book, will reduce their order accordingly. After all, six bucks is six bucks, and merchandise is merchandise. Or you would think. Yet the comics direct market has given rise to a unique and most unusual breed of businessman: the kind who alienates customers and doesn't like to make money. As I said, most retailers would simply lower their order; they may only be selling three, but they're turning 100% profit. But let's say the retailer orders ten and only sells the three. What has he lost? The ten comics have cost him \$10.00. He sells three; that's \$6.00 in the till. So he has lost \$4.00...or has he? Not necessarily. Because the chances that he will make up that \$4.00 in the sales of a bestseller like Wolverine or Spider-Man are, as Crocodile Dundee would put it, better than average. (And as I've stated, if the retailer then put one iota of energy into promoting the comic, he just might sell more than three.)

Admittedly, when you multiply this sort of scenario by 50 different indie comix, well, yes, you're starting to run a bigger risk. But adopting a policy of cutting yourself off from any title you can't sell ten copies of is taking "penny-wise-and-pound-foolish" to a ludicrous extreme. What



sort of businessman would snort at making even a mere six dollars? What sort of businessman would snort at making one dollar? One with lousy business acumen, apparently. (Another thing that makes this attitude so idiotic is that the same dealers who go into apoplexy over being "stuck" with, say, three copies of an indie at the end of the month are customarily stuck with hundreds of unsold X-Men, Punisher, Spider-Man, and other assorted Marvel rags. But I guess those are collectible, huh?) Suffice it to say that this policy shows no economic logic at all, and it would be laughable if it weren't for the fact that it's precisely this type of pinheadedness that kills books like mine.

One last depressing thought: it should be noted that the above writers, Patrick Conroy, Scott Wilhelm, Michael Parkin, as well as others I don't have room for here, took it upon themselves to locate *Hepcats* when their dealers didn't come through. Makes me wonder how many more fans have simply left the shops with a shrug.

Okay, enough sarcastic, vitriolic spleen-venting, but I really thought you might like to know how things are out there. So let's wrap up with a few more upbeat letters, shall we?

Dear Mr. Wagner,

I have just finished issue number 4 of *Hepcats*, and I must say that I am pleasantly surprised to see that the quality of the writing has not deteriorated since the first issue. Often it seems that as a strip continues the writing deteriorates either due to deadline pressure (you seem to avoid that by just pushing back the deadline), or because the writer's interest wanes. (There is the third reason that the writer does not have the talent he or she first exhibited, but given your strong writing in all four issues, I feel that does not apply to you.)

Given all of the above, I am

enclosing a check for \$11 for a copy of *Yo*, if you still have any copies of the first printing.

One other thought, I was also impressed with the quality and intelligence of the letters in issue four. Although I think the issue as to why you make your characters animals instead of humans is silly and irrelevant (they're your characters, and you get to make them whatever you want), the rest of the comments were interesting. Keep up the good work.

Very Truly Yours,

LAWRENCE FARBER  
LEVERETT, MA

The advantage to doing a book like *Hepcats* as opposed to some corporate-owned sock-em-up saga is that you tend to get too deeply personally involved in the series to simply let your interest wane (no offense to my buddy Lew Shiner, who co-wrote DC's Time Masters and is starting up Epic's new Wild Cards). Anyway, I'm happy you like the writing, and I do intend to keep it up.

Dear Mr. Wagner,

Please find enclosed a personal cheque for eleven dollars to cover cost and postage for a copy of *Yo*, your *Hepcats* compendium. How would you feel about autographing the book before you send it? I'd love to add *Yo* to my library, as well as your signature to my collection.

On a more personal note, I am a free-lance writer who spends most of his staring at a computer screen full of words. I like nothing better, at the end of the day, than to kick back with my pipe and a stack of graphic literature (read: comics). Sim's *Cerebus*, of course, has always been a great favorite although I must say, Martin, you're giving Dave a damn fine run for his money.

*Hepcats* is beautiful. Aside from the artwork, characterizations and various plot-lines (all of which are excellent), I enjoy the *feel* of your work. I have yet to read one issue that has not made me feel something.

Issue 1 made me laugh; Issue 2 made me go, "Wow! how'd he do that?"; Issues 3 and 4 have made me "angry" (not at the work, but at the way Joey's friends treat him.)

Can you dig it, Martin? I actually feel sorry for a creature that has the body of a man and the head of an Alsatian. You must be doing something right!

Keep up the good work!

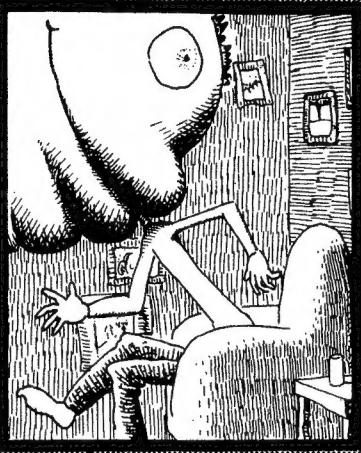
Sincerely,

J. MASON  
TUCSON, AZ

P.S. My greeting to your lovely wife & best wishes on her dancing. Congrats on the nuptials.

Well, honestly, all my characters really love Joey. Really. And, uh, I think Joey has the head of a cat...I hope...but, yeah, I can dig it.

# SAM HURT



# EYEBEAM

PREMIERING THIS  
DECEMBER FROM  
DOUBLE DIAMOND  
PRESS

DOUBLE  
DIAMOND  
PRESS



DRAWN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY

*(sorry)*